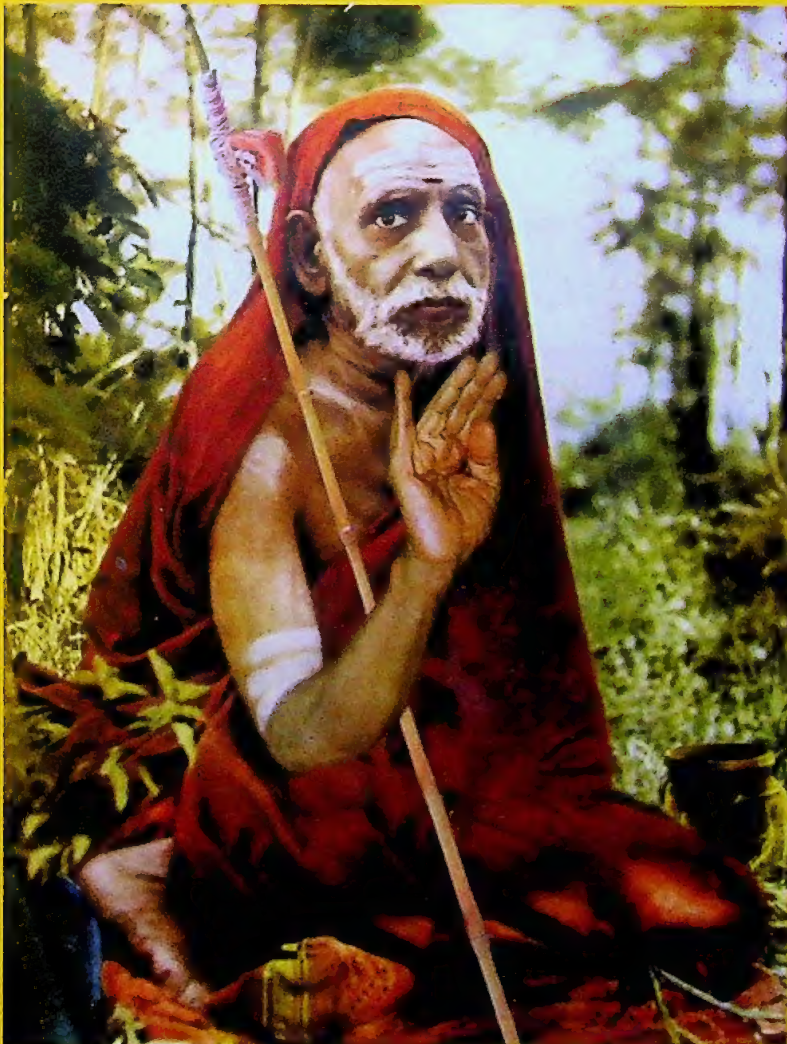
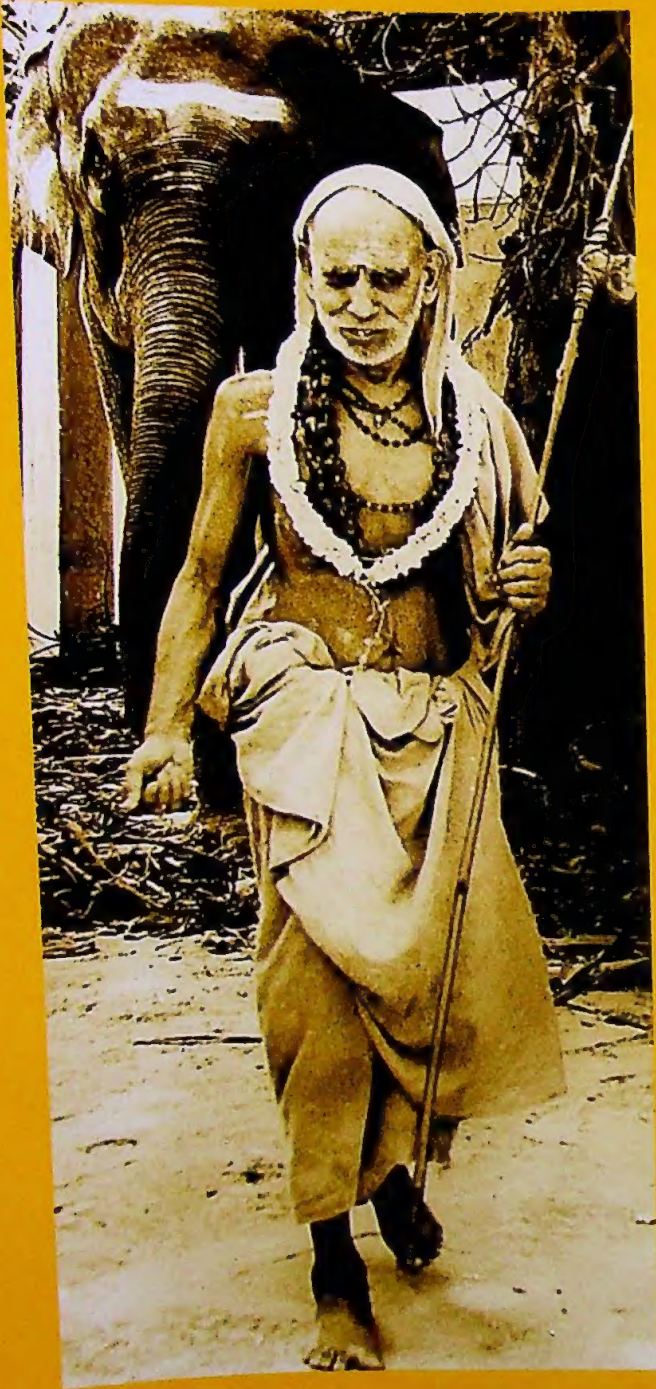


Voice of GOD



Volume - 6



Published by
Sri Kanchi Mahaswami Peetarohana
Shatabdi Mahotsava Trust

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Published by

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Shatabdi Mahotsava Trust

1 & 4, Kailas Bhavan, Plot 258, Sion Road, Sion (West), Mumbai 400 022

First Edition : February 13, 2006

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1 & 4, Kailas Bhavan,

Plot 258, Sion Road,

Sion (West), Mumbai 400 022

Website : www.srikanchimahaswami100.org

Email : contact@srikanchimahaswami100.org

Price : Rs. 500/-

Printed at

Gnanodaya Press,

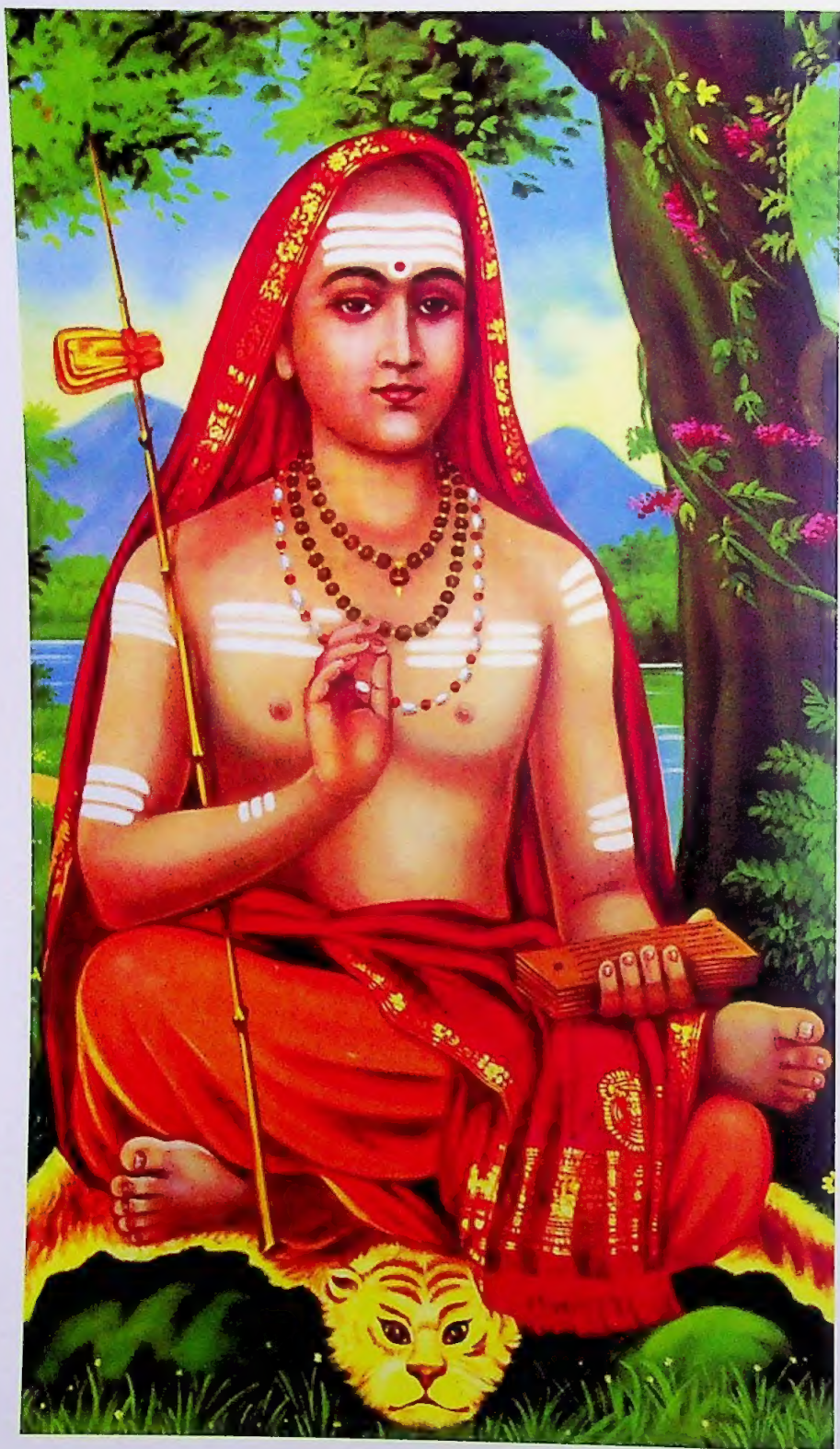
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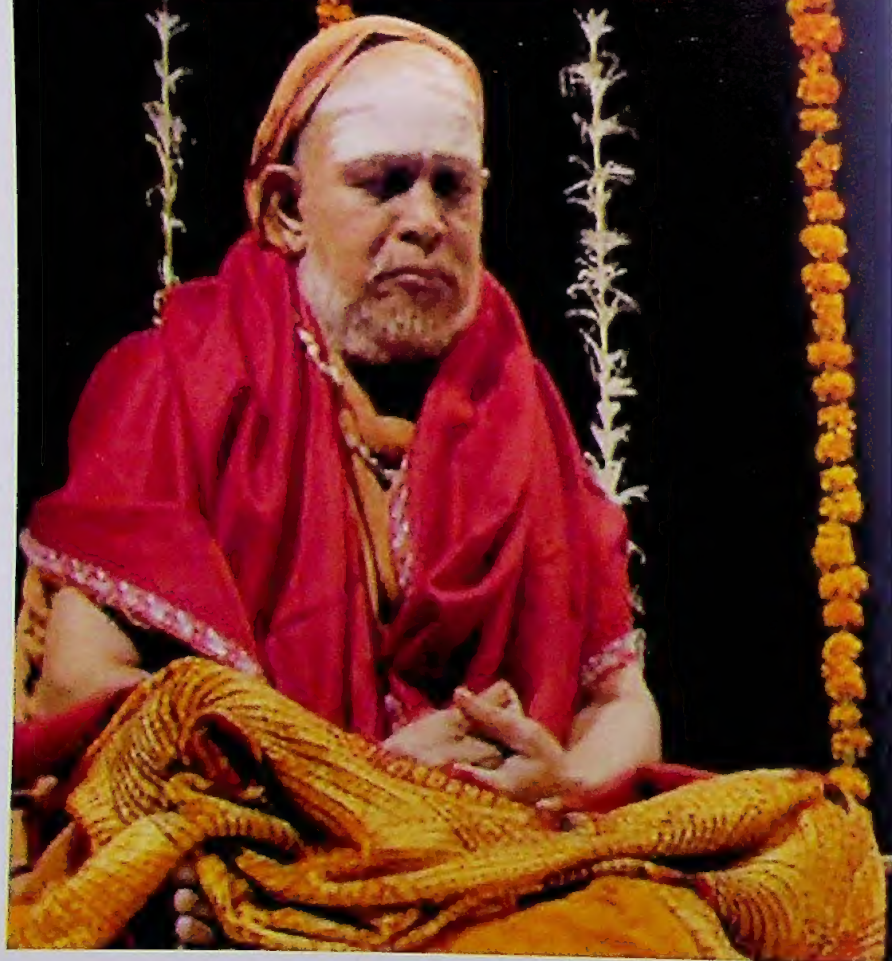
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LARA HARA SANKAR
JAYA JAYA SANKAR





Email: skmkanci@md3.vsnl.in
kanchimutt@vsnl.com
www.kamakoti.org.

Sri Chandramouleeswaraya Namaha:
Sri Sankara Bhagavadpadacharya Paramparagatha Moolamnaya

Phone : (04112) 222115
Fax: (04112) 224305
(04112) 222104

His Holiness Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetadhipathi
JAGADGURU SRI SANKARACHARYA SWAMIGAL SRIMATAM SAMSTHANAM
No. 1, Salai Street, Kancheepuram - 631 502 Tamilnadu, India.

SRI JAYENDRA SARASWATHI SWAMIJI PEETAROHANA SWARNA JAYANTI
MAHOTSAV YEAR



१३-२-२००६

॥ सनातनधर्मपरिपोषणम् ॥

कलियुगेऽस्मिन् प्रायः २५०० वर्षेभ्यः पूर्वं कैलारावासी परमेश्वरः
कालट्यां शिवगुरु-आर्याम्बयोः पुत्रत्वेन अवततार । यः खलु स्वकीयोपदेशैः
लोकशङ्करत्वं प्राप्य अन्वर्थतया श्रीशङ्करो बभूव । आत्मतत्त्वोपदेशैः
तापपापाञ्जनान् सर्वान् जनान् त्रातुं तत्र तत्र आसेतुहिमाचलं पद्भ्यां सञ्चरन्तः
कर्म-भक्ति-ज्ञानमार्गं प्रदर्शयन्तः षण्मतरस्थापनां, शैव-शाक्त-कौमार-गाणपत्य-
सौर-वैष्णव-पूजापद्धतिरूपां कार्यं विधाय महोपकारं कृतवन्तः ।

अत्र स्थापितस्य मतानुष्ठानस्य सर्वदाऽभिवृद्धये, सर्वजनसुखाय
सर्वजनहिताय आचरणमार्गस्य अविच्छिन्नतया प्रदर्शयितुं चतसृषु दिक्षु मठान्
स्थापयित्वा श्रीकाङ्च्यां स्वयम् अधिष्ठाय सर्वज्ञपीठमारुढवन्तः इति
बहुप्रमाणसिद्धो वृत्तान्तः ।

तत्र श्रीकाङ्चीमठपरम्परायां शिष्य-प्रशिष्यपरम्पराया महान्तो गुरुवः
बोधेन्द्रादयः वैदिकमतपोषणं स्वीयदेशानुष्ठानाभ्यां कुर्वन्तः अविच्छिन्नतया अद्य
यावदनुवर्तन्ते । अत एव विद्यारण्यस्वामिभिः “शम्भोमूर्तिश्चरतिभुवने
शङ्कराचार्यरूपा “इति वर्तमानप्रयोगः कृतः ।

परम्परायामस्यां पीठाधिपत्वेन स्वनामधन्याः अस्मद्गुरुवः
श्रीचन्द्रशेखरेन्द्रसरस्वतीस्वामिपादाः व्यराजन्त ।

एते “प्रत्यक्षदैवम्” इत्येवं प्रसिद्धाः अस्माकं गुरुवः श्रीचन्द्रशेखरेन्द्र-
सरस्वतीस्वामिनः स्वीये त्रयोदशे वयसि काञ्चीकामकोटिपीठम् आरुढाः । ततः
परं स्वस्य शतवत्सरपर्यन्तं पीठे स्थित्वा वेदधर्मशास्त्राचारपरिपालनाय
असंख्यानि कार्याणि कृतवन्तः ।

१. तत्र तत्र वेदपाठशालाः संस्थाप्य वेदापाठशालासु छात्राणाम्
अध्यापकानां च विद्यादिदानद्वारा प्रोत्साहनाय वेदरक्षणनिधि-
संस्थास्थापनम् अकार्षुः ।
२. सन्ध्यानुष्ठानम्, जातकर्म-नामकरणम्-अन्नप्राशन-चौलोपनयनम्-
विवाहादिकर्म, तदुपयुक्तमन्त्राणां अर्थबोधनाय पूर्वोक्तकर्मसु
श्रद्धोत्पादनाय “वेदधर्मपरिपालनसभां” प्रत्यस्थापयन् ।
३. स्वीयषष्ठ्यब्दपूर्तिसन्दर्भे चतुर्वेद-भाष्याणां प्रचाराय
वेदभाष्याध्ययन-अध्यापनाय च षष्ठ्यब्दपूर्तिसंस्थां संस्थाप्य
वेदभाष्यप्रचारं शास्त्रपण्डितानाम् आस्थानविदुषां च मार्गदर्शने सर्वाणि
शास्त्राणि पाठयित्वा प्राचीनशास्त्रोद्धारं च अकार्षुः ।
४. भक्तिमार्गप्रसाराय तामिल्-संस्कृतस्तोत्राणि कण्ठस्थीकृतवद्भ्यः
सर्वेभ्यः पारितोषिकं दत्तवन्तः ।
५. कलौ मुख्यधर्मस्य नामसंकीर्तनस्य विशेषतोऽभिवृद्धये नामलेखकानां
सर्वेषां योग्यसम्माननं कृत्वा प्रोत्साहितवन्तः ।
६. सनातनवैदिकधर्मानुष्ठातृणां श्रद्धाभक्ति-विवर्धनाय ते तत्र तत्र
वैदिककर्मणां, मन्त्राणां विशिष्टार्थान् प्रवचनरूपेण शास्त्रज्ञद्वारा
बोधितवन्तः ।

७. और्ध्वदैहिकानुष्ठानाय अपेक्षित-स्थलाभावात् उत्पन्नक्लेशनिवर्तये ज्ञानवापीस्थलानि निर्माय सर्वेषां स्वधर्मनुष्ठानाय बहूपकृतवन्तः ।

महान्तः एते स्वपद्मयाम् एव सम्पूर्ण भारतदेशे यात्रां च विधाय काशीयात्रां च कृत्वा बहूनि भगवत्पादस्मारकाणि दृढभवनानि तत्र तत्र स्थापितवन्तः ।

१) मण्डनमिश्र-श्रीशङ्करसंवादो जगत्प्रसिद्धः विराजते । स च प्रयोगक्षेत्रे संबृत्त इति हेतोः तस्मिन् पुण्यक्षेत्रे तत्स्मारकतया वेदवेदाङ्गवेदान्त-त्रिवेणीसंगमक्षेत्रे गंगायमुनासरस्वतिरांगमे प्रसिद्धत्रिवेणीसंगमे संगमस्नानसमनन्तरं दर्शनार्थं प्रसिद्धशंकरविमानमंडपं स्थापयामासुः ।

२. रामेश्वरक्षेत्रे समुद्रतीरे एव श्रीशङ्करमठं, मूर्तिं च प्रतिष्ठाय स्मारकचिह्नं च कृतवन्तः ।

३. श्रीकालटिक्तेत्रेऽपि भगवत्पादानां कीर्तिस्तंभं च प्रतिष्ठाप्य अनेक जनेषु गुरुस्मरणम् उत्पादितवन्तः ।

४. हम्पिनगरे चतुर्वेदभाष्यप्रणेतृणां श्रीविद्यारण्यस्वामिनाम् आवासभूमौ कांश्चन मासानुषित्वा तत्रैव विद्यमानानां शिलाशासनानां क्रोडीकरणम्, तद्विषये तत्रत्यप्राचीनसंस्कृतिविषये शोधं च कारयित्वा लोकोपकारार्थं, विद्यारण्यश्रीचरणानां विषये लोके श्रद्धाभक्त्युत्पादयितुं च सर्वान् शिलाशासनस्थविषयान् संगृह्य बहूनि पुस्तकानि मुद्रापयामासुः ।

५. काञ्चीपुर द्रस्ट सस्थां सस्थाप्य देवपूजायाः अवश्यकर्तव्यत्वम्, प्राचीनजीर्णमन्दिरेषु पूजाकर्तुणां मासिकं वेतनं प्रदाय प्रजाद्वारा जनेषु भक्तिबीजम् उत्पादितवन्तः ।

६. भारते बहुत्र देवालयानां जीर्णतां प्राचीनतां च दृष्ट्वा स्व तपःशक्त्या तत्रत्य महिमानं ज्ञात्वा तेषां जीर्णोद्धारं पुनः प्रतिष्ठां च अकार्षुः ।

७. नवीनशास्त्रप्रभावेण प्राचीनशास्त्राणां, अध्येतृणां च संख्या न्यूना सम्पन्नेति ज्ञात्वा विभिन्नशास्त्राणां तत्रापि विशेषतः न्यायशास्त्रस्य संरक्षणाय काङ्क्षामेव न्यायविद्यालयं स्थापयामासुः ।

८. प्राचीनशास्त्रपण्डितानां मासिकं वेतनम् अल्पमिति ज्ञात्वा मत्वा च, तद्वारा कुटुम्बसंरक्षणे क्लेशं दृष्ट्वा प्रतिपण्डितं न्यूनातिन्यूनम् अष्टशतं मासिकसम्भावना भवत्विति स्वकृपया गुरुवारसभापद्धतिमनुष्ठाय शास्त्रपण्डितानाम् आजीवनं संरक्षणमिदानीमपि अनुस्यूततया विधीयमानमस्ति ।

९. पण्डितानां स्वस्थले एव सम्भावनां दत्त्वा शिष्यान् तत्रैव सम्प्रेष्य शास्त्राध्ययनं कारितवन्तः तद्वारा सजीकृताः विद्यार्थिनः भारते बहुत्र विराजन्ते ।

१०. “देयं दीनजनाय च वित्तम्” इति भगवत्पादसूक्तिम् अवलम्ब्य कैङ्कर्यसभाः वल्लीः प्रतिनगरे प्रतिग्रामं च संस्थाप्य दीनानां विवाहादिषु कार्येषु अपरिमितशक्त्या धनसाहाय्यं कृतवन्तः ।

एवं बहुविधलोकोपकारकार्याणां प्रत्यक्षतया परोक्षतया वा सहकृतवतां तपोमूर्तिणां जगद्गुरूणां साक्षात् ईश्वरस्वरूपाणां महतां पीठारोहणशताब्दी आगामिनिवर्षे आगमिष्यति । तत्सन्दर्भे तत्र भवतां तेषां महतां स्मरणेन तदभीष्टानां सत्कर्मणां सर्वेषां परितः अभिवृद्धये नानाविधाः कार्यक्रमाः आयोजनीयाः इति बहुभिः भक्तैः वाञ्छ्यते । तादृशमहोत्सवकार्यक्रमाः सम्यक् प्रचलन्तु इति आशारमहे । तत्र च सर्वे आस्तिकजना भागं स्वीकृत्य जन्मसाफल्यं लभन्ताम् इति च क्रियते नारायणस्मृतिः ।



श्री काञ्चीकामकोटिपीठाधिपति जगद्गुरु श्रीजयेन्द्रसरस्वती गुरुस्तुतिः

श्री काञ्ची कामकोटि पीठाधिपति
जगद्गुरु श्री जयेन्द्र सरस्वती श्रीपादैः कृता

अपार करुणासिन्धुं ज्ञानदं शान्तरूपिणम् ।

श्री चन्द्रशेखरगुरुं प्रणममि मुदाऽन्वहम् ॥

गुरुवारसभाद्वारा शास्त्रसंरक्षणं कृतम्

अनूराधासभाद्वारा वेदसंरक्षणं कृतम् ।

मार्गशीर्षे मासवरे स्तोत्रपाठप्रचारणम्

वेदभाष्यप्रचारार्थं रत्नोत्सवनिधिः कृतः ॥

कर्मकाण्डप्रचारार्थं वेदधर्मसभा कृता

वेदान्तार्थप्रचारार्थं विद्यारण्यनिधिः कृतः ।

शिलालेखप्रचारार्थं उद्वंकितनिधिः कृतः

गोब्राह्मणहितार्थाय वेदरक्षणगोनिधिः ॥

गोशाला पाठशाला च गुरुभिस्तत्र निर्मिते

बालिकानां विवाहार्थं कन्यादाननिधिः कृतः ।

देवार्चकानां साह्यार्थं कच्छिमदुर निधिः कृतः

बालवृद्धातुराणां च व्यवस्था परिपालने ॥

अनाथप्रेतसंस्कारात् अश्वमेधफलं लभेत्

इति वाक्यानुसारेण व्यवस्था तत्र कल्पिता ।

यत्र श्रीभगवत्पादैः क्षेत्रपर्यटनं कृतम्

तत्र तेषां शिलाभूर्तिं प्रतिष्ठाप्य शुभं कृतम् ॥

भक्त वाञ्छाभिसिद्ध्यर्थं नामतारकलेखनम्

राजतं च रथं कृत्वा कामाक्ष्याः परिवाहनम् ।

कामाक्ष्यं बाविमानस्य स्वर्णपत्रैः समावृतः

मूलस्योत्सवकामाक्ष्याः स्वर्णवर्मपरिष्कृतिः ॥

ललितानामसाहस्रं स्वर्णमाला विराजते

श्रीदेव्याः पर्वकालेषु सुवर्णरथं चालनम् ।

चिदम्बरं नटेशस्य सुवैडूर्यकिरीटकम्

करेऽभयप्रदे पादे कुञ्चितं रत्नभूषणम् ॥

मुष्टितण्डुलदानेन दरिद्राणां च भोजनम्

रुग्णालये भगवतः प्रसादा विनियोजनम् ।

लोकक्षेमहितार्थाय गुरुभिः बहु तत्कृतम्

स्मरन् तद्वन्दनं कुर्वन् जन्मसाफल्यमाप्नुयात् ॥





सद्गुरुदशकम्

श्री शङ्करविजयेन्द्रसरस्वती श्रीचरणैः कृतम्

- श्रुतिस्मृतिपुराणोक्तधर्ममार्गरतं गुरुम् ।
भक्तानां हितवक्तारं नमस्ये चित्तशुद्धये ॥ १ ॥
- अद्वैतानन्दभरितं साधूनामुपकारिणम् ।
सर्वशास्त्रविदं शान्तं नमस्ये चित्तशुद्धये ॥ २ ॥
- कर्मभक्तिज्ञानमार्गप्रचारे बद्धकङ्कणम् ।
अनुग्रहप्रदातारं नमस्ये चित्तशुद्धये ॥ ३ ॥
- भगवत्पादपादाब्जविनिवेशितचेतसः ।
श्रीचन्द्रशेखरगुरोः प्रसादो मयि जायताम् ॥ ४ ॥
- क्षेत्रतीर्थकथाभिज्ञः सञ्चिदानन्दविग्रहः ।
चन्द्रशेखरवर्यो मे सन्निधत्तां सदा हृदि ॥ ५ ॥
- पोषणे वेदशास्त्राणां दत्तचित्तमहर्निशम् ।
क्षेत्रयात्रारतं वन्दे सद्गुरुं चन्द्रशेखरम् ॥ ६ ॥
- वेदज्ञान् वेदभाष्यज्ञान् कर्तुं यस्य समुद्यमः ।
गुरुर्यस्य महादेवः तं वन्दे चन्द्रशेखरम् ॥ ७ ॥

मणिवाचकगोदादिभक्तिवागमृतैर्भृशम् ।

बालानां भगवद्भक्तिं वर्धयन्तं गुरुं भजे ॥ ८ ॥

लघूपदेशैर्नास्तिक्यभावमर्दनकोविदम् ।

शिवं स्मितमुखं शान्तं प्रणतोऽस्मि जगद्गुरुम् ॥ ९ ॥

विनयेन प्रार्थयेऽहं विद्यां बोधय मे गुरो ।

मार्गमन्यं न जानेऽहं भवन्तं शरणं गतः ॥ १० ॥



INTRODUCTION

Location : Kalavai, a small town in the Vellore District of Tamil Nadu, India.

Date : February 13, 1907.

A young boy of thirteen is chosen to become the 68th Pītādhipathi of Sri Kānchi Kāmakōti Pītam, in the illustrious paramparā of Ācharyas who adorned the Pītam established by Sri Ādhi Śankarā more than 2500 years ago.

That boy is none other than His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Chandrāsēkharēndra Saraswathi Swāmigal. To millions of devotees he was simply 'Periyava' — the revered one or Maha-Periyava. 'Periyava' in Tamil means a great person. That term however has acquired a special meaning because it has come to refer to His Holiness. It is a term that at once conveys endearment, reverence and devotion. It would never be mentioned in a casual manner. Mahaswami and Pāramāchāryā are his other well-known appellations.

The Pāramāchāryā was the Pītādhipathi of the Mutt for 87 long years. During this period, Sri Kānchi Kāmakōti Pītam acquired new strength as an institution that propogated Sri Ādhi Śankarā's teachings. The devotion, fervour and intensity with which the Pāramāchāryā practised what Ādhi Śankarā had preached, is unparalleled. He lived a spartan life. Throughout his life, the main focus of his concern and activities was rejuvenating Vēdha adhyayana, the Dharma Sasthras and the age old tradition which

had suffered decline. 'Vēdha rakshanam' was his very life breath and he referred to this in most of his public discourses and private conversations. His providing regular support to Vēdha Pātāśālās through the Vēdha Rakshna Nidhi Trust (which he founded), honouring Vedhic scholars, holding regular sadhas which included discussions on arts and culture - these led to a renewed interest in Vedhic religion, Dharma sasthanas and Sanskrit. His long tenure as Pītāthipathi was the golden era of the Kānchi Kāmakōti Pītam.

Pāramāchāryā was a walking university. Scholars of all sects, not only from all over India but also from countries abroad came to him and deemed it a blessing and a privilege to go back enlightened after meeting him. His regular visitors ranged from the most ordinary village folk to the highest in the land. Presidents and Prime Ministers, Kings and Queens, Highnesses and Excellencies came to spend a few moments with him and seek his blessings.

That the Pāramāchāryā was an extraordinary phenomenon can be seen from this incident. When he was in his late eighties he left Kānchipuram and undertook a padha yathra through Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra. Before he returned to Kānchipuram he made all arrangements for the construction of an exquisite Nataraja temple at Satara (Uttara Chidambaram). The uniqueness about this temple is the fact that the states of Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra came together to build the 5 doorways to the temple. The state of Kerala supplied the entire wood required for the temple. It was only his grace and moral influence that made this possible.

The Pāramāchāryā's catholicity of outlook was extraordinary. He was the Advaita Ācharya. He was the authentic spokesman of Hindu religion and its Dharma Shastras and of Sanathana Dharma. He even believed that it was Vedhic religion that had prevailed all over the world in ancient times. But, just as he had high regard for the Ācharyas of other philosophical doctrines

like Ramanuja and Madhva and the Nayanmars of Saiva Siddhanta, he had great respect for Jesus and Mohamed Nabi, the Prophet. He could be so considerate as to express the view that those who indulged in proselytisation did so out of their conviction that their religion alone could secure redemption.

February 13, 2006 marks the beginning of the 100th year of the Pāramāchāryā's Sanyāsa Swīkarana (entering the ascetic order) and Pītārōhaṇa (becoming the head of the Sri Kānchi Kāmakōti Pītam). Sri Kanchi Mahaswami Peetarohana Shatabdi Mahotsava Trust has been specially formed to celebrate this significant milestone in the spiritual history of India.

The main objective of the Trust is to spread the thoughts and the message of the Pāramāchāryā across the world, not just to his devotees, but even to others who might never have had the opportunity to have his dharsan. With this objective in view the Trust has undertaken on priority the translation into English and other major Indian languages of his discourses in Tamil (upansayam). To begin with, we have chosen 'Deivathin Kural' - Voice of God in Tamil. It is a collection of the Pāramāchāryā's discourses starting from 1932. There are seven volumes each of about 1000 pages. His talks cover a wide range of topics apart from all aspects of Vedhic dharma and Hindu religion which is the main focus. It is a veritable encyclopedia of Hindu religion and dharma to which people refer for authentic information on these aspects.

'Deivathin Kural' is a monumental work by Sri Ra Gānapathy and it occupies a special place among many books written about Pāramāchāryā. Sri Gānapathy painstakingly collated all of Pāramāchāryā's talks, conversations, casual comments, answers to questions etc covering several aspects of our ancient religion, dharma and culture. Sri Gānapathy not only collected the material but also collated and organized under various subjects everything that the Pāramāchāryā had spoken about a subject over many years, at several places.

The purpose of the English translation is two fold. One is to reach Pāramāchāryā's thoughts and message to a wider audience. The second is to use the English translation as the basic text for translation into other Indian languages. The original in Tamil portrays in large measure the simplicity and clarity of thoughts and expressions and the unique story telling style of the Pāramāchāryā. It has been our attempt to capture it in English. As readers will know this is not an easy task. In one of his talks, while explaining the need to protect the Vēdhas in their original form, the Pāramāchāryā himself has, in his characteristic style, referred to the limitations of any translation.

The Pāramāchāryā's observations are a warning to us and we are deeply conscious of our responsibility. Effort has been made to address the average reader through this work in simple language. Since the English version is to be the base from which translation into other Indian languages will be done, suitable diacritical markings have been used for Sanskrit and Tamil words. Wherever necessary the actual Sanskrit words and Ślōkās have been given with diacritical markings and the meanings are also given along with the words. This should make it more convenient for the reader than a separate glossary at the end.

It is usual to share one's good and memorable experiences with others. When two devotees of the Pāramāchāryā meet, it turns out to be an occasion for sharing of experiences. Entire train journeys could be spent talking only about him and his various qualities. He has indeed created a huge family, truly a Vasudaiva Kutumbhakam. It is the hope and wish of Sri Kanchi Mahaswami Peetarohana Shatabdi Mahotsava Trust that readers will experience the Pāramāchāryā through these pages, which in itself would be an elevating experience.

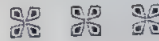
His talks do more than providing insight into Vedhic Dharma and Hindu religion. There is indeed hope that inspite of the

declining moral values all around, dharma will prevail. It should also be clear that mere wishful thinking will not make that happen. All of us have a duty and responsibility towards making it happen. The many schemes which the Pāramāchāryā introduced are simple and effective. If anything, we have to revive many of his practical ideas and implement them.

The blessings of H.H. Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swāmigal and H.H. Sri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswathi Swāmigal, the 69th and 70th Ācharyas of Sri Kānchi Kāmakōti Pītam have provided encouragement to this Trust to embark on a project of this magnitude. It is their Sankalpa that the Pāramāchāryā's message should reach every Indian wherever he may be. We are overwhelmed by the responsibility they have placed on us.

Millions of the Pāramāchāryā's devotees sincerely believe that He is alive even today and He is guiding us on the path of dharma. It is His spirit that acts as the beacon in these troubled times. It is through His grace that this work is being published.

Sri Kanchi Mahaswami
Peetarohana Shatabdi Mahotsava Trust
Mumbai
February 13, 2006



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

His Holiness Sri Chandrāsēkharēndra Saraswati the 68th Acharya of Sri Kānchi Kāmākoti Pītam, was humility personified. In the words of one of his ardent devotees, he was the greatest 'mayavi' — in this that he neither revealed himself as God nor as God's voice. He has not even hinted as much.

Throughout his public discourses and private conversations he has been meticulous in his expressions. He will always trace his views to the Vēdhas, the Puranas or the Dharma shastras. It was never 'my opinion or point of view'. His focus was on truth and since it is truth that he has consistently spoken about, the Tamil volumes came to be named 'Deivathin Kural' — meaning *Voice of God*.

In the introduction we have already referred to the Herculean efforts made by Sri Ra Gānapathy to compile the seven volumes of 'Deivathin Kural' and have them published. While all of us owe our eternal gratitude to Sri Gānapathy we, in the Trust, have a special duty not just to thank him but salute him, which we do with great pleasure.

We are also grateful to Sri Thirunavukkarasu of Vanathi Publications who has published all the seven volumes of 'Deivathin Kural'. He has rendered a glorious service for the preservation of Sanathana Dharma. Vanathi Publications have also graciously permitted us to translate the original Tamil works not only in English but also in other Indian languages. We specially thank them

for this. May the blessings of the Pāramāchāryā be always with them.

In his preface to the Tamil editions Sri Ganapathy has thanked Kalki and B.G. Paul & Co, a publishing house. He has also thanked several individuals making special mention of Sri Ananthānandēndra Saraswathy Swāmigal, popularly known as 'Sri Ānjanēya Swāmigal, who spent several years with the Pāramāchāryā. He was witness to several conversations and expositions of Pāramāchāryā on various topics. It was he who helped Sri Gānapathy to capture the delicate nuances on many subjects, discussed by the Pāramāchāryā. In addition, there were devotees who had assiduously taken notes from the Pāramāchāryā's conversations and speeches and gladly shared them with Sri Ganapathy but on strict conditions of anonymity. Such is their devotion and humility.

We approached Sri V. Krishnamachari of Mumbai for taking up the responsibility on the Tamil to English translation work. He readily consented to undertake the onerous task. Sri Krishnamachari who is in his late seventies is a retired official of the Railways. He had developed a flare for literary work very early in his life. He has been a freelance journalist and has also reviewed several books including books on religion. he has especially taken interest in translations and some of his translated works have been published by the Bharathiya Vidya Bhavan. Currently, he is the Executive Editor of Dilip, a magazine devoted to Hindu religion and culture, which was founded at the instance of the Paramacharya and He is also the Secretary of Bombay Tamil Sangham. He has done this English translation as a labour of love and we wish to record our grateful thanks to him.

It is to be mentioned that the Saundaryalahari portion is an adaptation of R.G.K's translation of the same, published earlier by Sri Kamakshi Seva Samiti, changes having been made to suit the

format and the diacritical marking system of the rest of this volume. We are grateful to the Samiti for having permitted the use of the relevant text.

As in all such projects, there will always be scores of silent volunteers, who do things just for the pleasure of rendering service. In this case, they have performed this as a yagna because of their unstinting devotion to the Pāramāchāryā. We are grateful to all of them.

It is because of the Divine grace and the blessings of the Pāramāchāryā that we even thought of this monumental project. While we were still thinking of the project, H.H. Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swāmigal and H.H. Sri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswathi Swāmigal gave us the much needed encouragement and impetus to plunge into this ocean of nectar in the manner of what Krishna did to Arjuna to spur him into action. We offer our obeisance to the two Ācharyas.

Sri Kanchi Mahaswami
Peetarohana Shatabdi Mahotsava Trust
Mumbai
February 13, 2006



GUIDANCE TO PRONUNCIATION OF
NON-ENGLISH WORDS WITH DIACRITICAL MARKING

ALPHABET	TO BE PRONOUNCED AS
Ā ā	A in August, Author
Ē ē	A in April, Angel
Ī ī	E in East, Eagle
Ō ō	o in open, over
Ū	oo in cool, Tool
Ś ś	S in Sivaji, Sankar Syamala
Ń ñ	n in rent, under, bundle
Ḳ ḳ	l in pluck, click, block

The word Āchāryā with capital A, whenever appearing, refers to
Ādhi Sankara Bhagavadpādā

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MANGALĀRAMBHAM





A LIFE BLESSED WITH SIXTEEN IS A GREAT LIFE

REMEDY FOR ALL OBSTACLES

At the commencement of learning, during marriage, when moving to a new place, when starting from a place, at the time of war - cutting it short, in all activities there is one who never faces any obstacle or hindrance.

*Vidhyārambē vivāhē cha pravēṣe nirgamē thathā
Sangrāmē sarva kāryēshu Vignas-thasya na jāyathē*

Vidhyārambē - when learning is commenced - that is Brahmacharya *āśramam*. There will be no hindrance when going through that *āśramam*.

vivāhē cha - at the time of marriage - that means there will be no hindrance during *gruhashthāśramam* too.

Since very few people take to *sanyāsa āśramam* brahmacharya *āśramam* and *gruhashthāśramam* cover the entire life. So he faces no hindrance throughout his life.

What is life? It consists of a variety of changes or movements; it is engaging in several activities through the mind, speech, body, with buddhi and with money in a way that what is seen today is not there tomorrow. Although life is all movement it is only the movement done with the body that is clearly seen as such. In that too, the physical journey by which the body moves from one place to another is seen as the important movement. That is what is referred to as '*Pravēṣe nirgamē thathā*'. '*Pravēsam*' is moving into a place. '*Nirgamam*' is moving out from a place.

Thus, whatever the type of movement, we enter into something, we leave something and start. In all these there is one who faces no hindrance.

I said that life is movement. There is another definition which we frequently find these days in newspapers. We hear of the 'life's struggle'. Darwin's theory, Herbert Spencer theory etc say that it is through struggle that life has evolved.

If we think of it we will know that movement and struggle are connected with each other. If there is movement for only one and all the rest are motionless, he can move about comfortably as he likes. (I refer to all kinds of movements) But is it so in practice? It is restless motion for all beings. There is motion in inert things also! Even within an atom there is constant motion at the speed of electricity. If all beings and inert things are in constant motion will there not be clashes between them? Is not struggle a clash really?

If we go to the fundamental, when a being or an inert thing is involved in motion that itself is struggle. Is it not clear that when peace is attained we will settle down without movement? Not being in a state of peace, we struggle. Do we not speak of the antonyms of war and peace?

Although life itself is a struggle it is clearly seen to be so only when two people fight with each other. That is called '*Sangrāmē*'. '*Sangrām*' means fight, war. In war that one person will face no hindrance but will be victorious.

If we expand this, he will be successful in all his activities. We can expand this meaning still further and say that he will reach the state of perfection which is '*āthma samādhi*' in which there is no movement or struggle. Just as commencement of learning is indicative of brahmacharyam and marriage is indicative of *gruhasthāśramam* we can understand the state of '*āthma samādhi*' to mean the *sanyāsa āśramam*.

Instead of saying that he will face no obstacle in this or that or in this *āśramam* or that *āśramam*, the *ślokā* says

comprehensively 'in all activities' - *sarva kāryēshu* - he has no obstacle.

'sarva kāryēshu Vignas-thasya na jāyathē'

Thasya - for him

Sarva kāryēshu - in all activities

Vigna - obstruction or hindrance

Na jāyathē - does not happen

It is only if a thing is stated in different ways it gets registered in our mind. If it is merely said 'there will be no hindrance to anything' the emphasis will not be felt. Only if a few specific things are stated where there will be no hindrance and then it is said 'No hindrance in anything' it will register firmly in the mind.

Who is that one person? The answer to this is in the first part of the *ślōkā* which says :

Shōdaśaithāni nāmāni yah patēth sruṇuyādhapi

Shōdaśa ēthāni nāmāni yah patēth sruṇuyādh api

Ēthāni - This, that is what is stated before this.

Shōdaśa nāmāni - The sixteen names

Yah - One who

Patēth - Reads

Api - Or

Śruṇuyāth - Hears

To one who reads these sixteen names or hears them from another there is no hindrance in any of his efforts.

When a *Purāṇā* is read one who reads it is the *Vakthā* and the one who hears it is *Śrōthā*. But here we are concerned only with sixteen names. Although it is the practice to talk of 'reading and hearing' the real meaning is that we have to memorise the sixteen

names and repeat them. Those who have not memorized them can read them from a book or hear them from another.

If one reads or hears these sixteen names or better still memorises and recites them he will face no hindrance in all his endeavours.

Who is the *Swāmi* with these sixteen names? From the statement that 'There will be no hindrance' it can be guessed who he is. He is *Vignēśwarā*. He has several names. There are twenty one kinds of leaves and twenty one names for doing *archanā* to him. There are twenty one types of flowers and names for doing *archanā*. For doing *archanā* in pairs twenty one times with *dhurvā* grass there are twenty one names. Only sixteen names have been mentioned here for removal of hindrance to all efforts.

* * *

THE GREATNESS OF SIXTEEN

Sixteen is a number of great merit. We talk of '*Shōdaśa kalā pūrṇam*'. *Shōdaśam* is sixteen. Starting from the New Moon day (Amavasya) upto the Full Moon day (*Pournāmi*) the moon has sixteen phases (*Kalā*). It is when the moon attains the sixteenth *kalā*, it is *pournāmi*. The sixteen offerings we make during elaborate *pūjā* are called '*Shōdaśa upachāram*'. Just as we talk of *Saptha Māthrukā* for Seven *Dēvis* there are also sixteen *Dēvis* called *Shōdaśa Māthrukā*. Of the *Rāja Rājēswari manthrās* of *Ambāl* '*Shōdaśākshari*' is the highest. It is for this reason *Ambāl* has a name '*Shōdaśī*'.

In the Tamil region the usual manner of blessing anyone is that he 'should be blessed with sixteen and live a great life'. Here 'blessed with sixteen does not mean blessed with sixteen children as some people think but sixteen different things that are required for leading a good life. But the Vedhic benediction for the woman with husband is 'Lord ! May You bless her with ten children and make her treat her husband as the eleventh child'.

When any worship is commenced one should do Sankalpam (expressing a resolve) that 'I do this worship for being blessed with such and such things'. Sixteen things are included in this wish-list. Prosperity, stability, fortitude (*vīryam*), success, long life, good health and wealth for the whole family - these make seven; then to be blessed with *dharmā*, artha, kama and *mōksham* - these make four; fulfillment of desire, to be blessed with all auspicious things and destruction of all sins - these make two; for the betterment of the children and grand-children; finally the god to whom worship is offered should be pleased with it and by his prasād all wishes should be fulfilled. Those who feel that in all these there are more of worldly things add attainment of *jnāna* and *vairāgya*.

Blessings for a good life are sixteen and *Pillaiyār* has sixteen names!

* * *

SHŌDAŚA NĀMĀ ŚLŌKĀS

Sixteen names have been mentioned as being important to *Pillaiyār* - Sumukar, Ēkadhanthar, Kapilar, *Gajakarṇakar*, *Lambōdarar*, Vikatar, *Vignarājar*, *Vināyakar*, *Dhūmakēthu*, *Gañādhyaḱshar*, *Bhālachandrar*, *Gajānanar*, *Vakrathuṇḁdar*, *Sūrpakarṇār*, *Hērambar* and *Skandapūrvajar*. For remembering these names easily, they have been given in the form of a *ślōkā*.

*Sumukaschaika dhanthascha kapilō gajakarnakah
Lambōdharascha vikatō vignarājō vināyakah
Dhūmakēthur gañādhyaḱshah Bhālachandrō gajānanah
Vakrathuṇḁdah sūrpakarṇō hērambah skandapūrvajah*

It is after this *ślōkā* the three line *ślōkā* '*Shōḁasaithani..... Na Jāyathē*' comes.

Vignēswarā has taken several forms. In that there is a group which has sixteen forms and it is called '*Shōḁaśa Gaṇāpathi*'. I tried to find out if these sixteen names are those of the *Shōḁaśa*

Gaṇapathi. I found it is not so. In the *Shōḍaśa nāmās* the third is Kapilar. It means the red colour of arecanut. But the dhyana *ślōkā* of *Shōḍaśa Gaṇapathi* says that the third form is of the colour of *śarad* moon. In the *Shōḍaśa nāmā* the fifteenth is *Hēramba* but in the group of sixteen the eleventh has the name as *Hēramba*. There are several discrepancies like this. Therefore the two are different classifications. But we are now concerned with the sixteen names.

* * *

SUMUKAR

This is the first name. It is said that when we welcome someone we should do so with 'Sumukam'. Sumukam is good face. A good face is one which brims with love and happiness. When the love and happiness in the heart is reflected in the face it becomes Sumukam. Do we not say that the face is the index of the mind? *Vignēśwarā* has such a Sumukam which reflects his inner love. A face that reflects a good mind is Sumukam.

In the '*Śuklāmbharatharam*' *ślōkā* there is 'Prasanna Vadanam'. That is Sumukam. When love and the happiness that comes out of it get reflected externally in the face, it is 'Prasanna Vadanam'. Clarity, confidence and brightness make Prasanna Vadanam. The 'Su' which is part of Sumukam also refers to that Prasannam.

In whatever form *Vignēśwarā* may be, His inner love and joy will be reflected in the face and He will be Sumukar. Because He has the elephant face, these shine on His face in an extraordinary manner. There is something special about the face of the elephant due to which we like to keep looking at it and do not feel tired of it. Its face is broad, commanding, extremely peaceful and something which belies description (if it can be described it will not be so great!). Since *Vignēśwarā* has such an elephant face the name Sumukar specially fits Him.

HOW GANAPATHI WITH HUMAN FACE BECAME ELEPHANT-FACED

When we say 'In whatever form He may be' we are reminded of the Naramukha *Gañapathi* (*Gañapathi* with human form). In the South street in Chidambaram, He is with the human face, so much so that He cannot be identified as *Gañapathi* unless one is told so. In *Tiruchirāpalli* also, in the Rockfort Temple, there is Naramukha *Gañapathi*.

According to one of the stories relating to His several manifestations His original form was human. *Ambāl* thought of creating a guard for Her palace. She wiped Her body and with the turmeric, kumkum and incense powder etc which She gathered, She made the form of a young man and gave the form life. She kept him outside as guard and went to have Her bath.

Ambāl is auspicious in every way (*Sarva Mangalā*). It is because She had created the original *Pillaiyār* from out of the auspicious turmeric we make *Pillaiyār* out of turmeric powder and do *pūjā* before commencing anything auspicious.

Paramēswarā came to *Pārvathi*'s palace. He thought 'Who is this male member in my wife's palace' and got angry and as if He was not aware of anything He cut off his head. Really speaking, He knew everything but He acted in this manner for the good of the world and did it in the manner of an absorbing drama. The good of the world is this : An *asurā* by name *Gajamukāsurā* (who had the elephant face) had obtained a boon that only someone with an elephant head like him and who is not born of male-female union, could kill him. Around this time, near *Kailās* an elephant was lying with its head to the North which is bad for the world. The Lord combined the two situations and played the drama. For having beheaded the beloved child created by *Ambāl* He got pulled up by *Ambāl*. Then He killed the elephant which was lying with its head to the North, brought that head, fixed it on the torso, gave it life

and pleased *Ambāl*. He caused the destruction of *Gajamukāsurā* through *Pillaiyār* and ensured the welfare of the world.

* * *

ONE WHO IS OF THE FORM OF JOY

Vignēśwarā with a smiling face is the very form of joy. Happiness is perfection. We talk of '*Ānandha Pūrṇam*'. (*Sadaśiva*) *Brahmmēndrāl* has sung '*Sathatham Ānandha Pūrṇa Pōthōham*' and *Sachithānanda Pūrṇa Pōthōham*'. If there is joy there will be laughter and with that music and dance. When one is sorrowful if he is asked to dance, will he do it? It is because *Pillaiyār* is of the form of bliss, He is *Nritha Gaṇapathi*. In many *Śiva* temples, the chief among the deities on the outer wall of the sanctum sanctorum is the *Narthana Vināyakar*. Happily laughing, he will dance with his huge stomach.

It can be said that for his joy the stomach also is the index just as the face.

Mukam means 'beginning'. It is appropriate that the names begin with *Sumukar*.

* * *

ONE WITH THE GOOD MOUTH

Mukam means not only the entire face but also the mouth. In Sanskrit there is no separate name for the mouth. The part which is the instrument of speech and which speaks all the names has no name for itself. In Tamil there is name for the mouth but there is no name for the face, grammatical or literary. It appears that in olden times the students of the Sanskrit *gati*kās and Tamil schools used to make fun of each other. One will say that the other has no mukam. The other will say of the first that he has no mouth. Such exchanges were not out of linguistic rivalry but were in good humour.

I wanted to say that mukam means the mouth. When it is said Sumukam - good mouth - which is that? The mouth that speaks good things is a good mouth. That is why a good scholar (vidwan) has the name 'Sumukar'. Understood this way also, *Pillaiyār* is Sumukar. He is a great vidwan. There is no difference between Him and the great scholars referred to in the *Vēdhās* as *Brahmañaspathi* or Bruhaspathi.

Of the several forms, there is one who is *Vidhyā Gaṇapathi*. In Chaturthi *Pūjā Kalpam* it is laid down that the names of the twenty one different forms are to be repeated and *archanā* should be done with twenty one different types of flowers. For *Vidhyā Gaṇapathi* the flower prescribed is '*Rasāḷa*'. *Rasāḷam* (commonly spoken of as *Rasaḷu*) is the sweetest of the mango variety. *Vidhyā* is such a mango for the soul. *Paramaśivā* kept as prize the fruit brought by *Nāradā* to be given to the one who comes first after completing a round of the world. *Vignēśwarā* won the prize. That fruit of *jñāna* was the mango.

Sumukar has vidwath, *vidhyā* and the *jñāna* obtained from them.

* * *

THE GREATNESS OF THE ELEPHANT'S MOUTH AND ITS PHILOSOPHY

There is something special about the mouth of an elephant. For human beings and animals the mouth is always visible with the lips spread from one end to the other. Only the eyes have the eyelids which keep moving up and down to protect the eyes. Although, just as the eyelids close the eyes, the lips close and hide the teeth and the tongue, there is a difference. The eyelids have no role in seeing which is the function of the eyes. The lips have a major role in speech. Sound is produced jointly by the tongue, teeth and lips. Since sounds like 'pa' 'ma' etc are pronounced mainly by the lips, they are called '*oshtyam*'. In English also such sounds are called 'labial'.

It is only for the elephant that its trunk hides its mouth. Closing the mouth with the hand is a sign of humility. We have to specially do the act of closing the mouth with the hand. But for the elephant the trunk in the normal position hides the mouth. It is only when it lifts the trunk for putting the food inside the mouth or for any other reason the mouth can be seen. There is a lot of philosophical meaning in *Pillaiyār* having such a mouth. He is in the form of elephant with the mouth closed by the trunk only to show that, however much one's scholarship (vidwat) may be, instead of being talkative the mouth should be kept closed except when necessary and that is the characteristic of a vidwan. He shows that the final stage of all vidwat is 'mounam'.

* * *

ĒKADANTHAR:

'ONE WHO WILL DO HIS UTMOST TO OTHERS'

Ēkadanthar means one who has a single tusk. Generally male elephants will have two tusks and female elephants have no tusk. But he has a single tusk.

He too had two tusks. He himself broke the tusk on the right side. In idols we can see him keeping it in his right lower hand. Why did he break it? There are two different stories in the *Purāṇās*. According to one story when Vyasa kept narrating *Mahābhāratham*, *Vignēswarā* had to write it down immediately on the Himalayan rock. He did not have a stylus (writing instrument) and therefore he broke his own tusk and used it as the stylus. This story highlights the noble quality of sacrificing what is most valuable for an elephant.

Another story has it that *Gajamukāsuran* could not be killed with any other weapon. Therefore he broke his tusk and used it as the weapon to kill him. It is a story that shows that for the welfare of the world he gave his very bone. For the *Thirukkural* which

talks of such a sacrifice the example of *Dādhiśi* rishi (when Indra wanted to make *vajrāyudham* to kill *Vruthrāsura*, *Dādhiśi* rishi gave his own bone for the purpose) is given. The tusk is also elephant's bone. Therefore *Pillaiyār* also is one who gives his very bone in the service of others.

* * *

ONE WHO IS ALSO A FEMALE

There is a philosophical meaning for his being with single tusk. It is only to show the principle of God-head which is both male and female. He is a male on one side with the tusk and a female on the other side without a tusk. Just as his parents are in the *Ardhanārīśwarā* form he too displays both the male and female form. In *Ardhanārīśwarā* it is male form on the right side and female form on the left side. But for *Vignēśwarā* it is just the opposite.

* * *

VIGNĒŚWARĀ GĀYATHRĪ

There is a *Gāyathrī manthrā* appropriate to each deity. When *Gāyathrī manthrā* is given as *Brahmōpadēsam* at the time of upanayanam that *Gāyathrī* is for the deity *Savithā* who is *Paramāthma Śakthi* and who is in the effulgence of the Sun. It consists of twenty four alphabets. All *dēvathās* have *Gāyathrī* of the same scale. These *manthrās* are of three parts, each of eight alphabets. In every part, the name of the *dēvathā* to which the *manthrā* is appropriate is mentioned. In the first part one name is mentioned and then said 'We will know such a deity'. In the second part, another name of the same deity is mentioned and it is said 'Let us meditate on such a *dēvathā*'. In the third part, another name is mentioned and said 'May such a deity prod us on the right path'. (In the *Gāyathrī* for *Savithā* for the first two parts together it will be 'Let us meditate'. In the third part without mentioning a name it will be said 'Let the deity activate our intellect'. According

to *Mahā Nārāyaṇōpanishad* in the *Gāyathrī manthrās* which are popular - the *Gāyathrī* of *Paramasivā*, *Vignēswarā*, *Subrahmaṇyar* and *Nandikēswarar* - 'Thath Purusha' is mentioned as the first name. But in *Atharva Vēdhā*, there is a *Gāyathrī* specially for *Vignēswarā*. It is called '*Gaṇapathyatharvāsīrsham*'. There is one *Gaṇapathi Gāyathrī* in that. In this the first name is *Ēkadanthar*.

* * *

KAPILAR : VINĀYAKĀ OF TIRUCHENGATTĀNKUDI

The third name is Kapilar. It means that he is dull-red in colour.

Vignēswarā is of different colours in His different forms. In the *ślōkā* '*Śuklāmbharatharam*' it is said that he is white like the moon (*Śasī varṇam*). In *Tiruchengattānkudi* near *Kumbakōṇam* and in *Idumbavanam* near *Tiruthuraipūṇḍi*, there is white *Vināyakar* (*Swētha Vināyakar*). *Avvayār* in one of her *sthothrās* describes Him as being blue in colour and in another *sthothrā* as the colour of coral. The child-God would have given *dharṣan* to that old lady in different colours! In the Northern parts of India *Vignēswarā* is generally red with '*sindhūr*'. In *Thanjāvūr* District, there is a temple called '*Gaṇapathīswaram*' in *Tiruchengattānkudi*. The main word in this is '*Śenkādu*' which means 'Red forest'. When *Vignēswarā* killed *Gajamukāśura*, the *asurā*'s blood flowed through the forest and the forest became red and *Pillaiyār* also became red. It may not be pure red. We may take it that it is a colour we may see when blood is over the black body of the elephant.

It appears *Vignēswarā* thought that by killing a great warrior and shedding his blood he was afflicted by '*Vīrahaththi dhōsham*'. He cannot suffer any *dhōsham*. It is only to show us the way that he had acted in this way. Did not Rama think that he had suffered *dhōsham* by killing *Rāvanā* and as expiation (*prāyaschitham*) he

installed *Rāma*lingam and worshipped? In the same manner it appears that *Pillaiyār* also installed a lingam in *Tiruchengattānkudi*, did *Śiva pūjā* and had his *dhōsham* remedied. Therefore just as the place where Rama did *Śiva pūjā* became *Rāmēswaram* the temple at *Tiruchengattānkudi* became *Gaṇapathīswaram*.

* * *

VĀTHĀPI GAṆAPATHI : SOME HISTORICAL DETAILS

Then *Vāthāpi Gaṇapathi* arrived at the same place. He is the *Gaṇapathi* who was worshipped by Agasthiya Muni for digesting the *asurā*, *Vāthāpi* who had entered his stomach deceitfully. The place where the *asurā*, *Vāthāpi* lived and was killed is also called *Vāthāpi* (present day *Badāmi* in the *Bijāpur* District of Karnataka). It also became the capital of the rulers of the *Chālukya* dynasty.

In the *Chālukya* dynasty there were two kings with the name *Pulakēsi*. The copper plate edicts of the *Chālukyās* are in Sanskrit and their stone inscriptions are in Kannada. In Kannada, *Pulakēsi* has been mentioned as *Polekēsi*. Although several roots of this word in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada are mentioned, once they became kings they had the Sanskrit name *Pulakēsi*. Historians have deciphered this name as *Pulakēsin*, *Pulakēsi* in Sanskrit and write the same in English also.

Pulakēsi means one who has the hairs standing on end due to ecstasy (*Pulakānkith*). A king carries out courageous acts which make his hair stand on end and also make the hairs stand on end of those who see such acts or hear of such acts. One who does this is *Pulakēsi*.

In the story which we are going to see, *Mahēndra Varma Pallavā* was one of the two great kings who were rivals to *Pulakēsi* II. Greater than the *Pallavā* king was Harsha Vardhan in the North. The name Harsha also has the same meaning as *Pulakēsi*. *Pulakēsi*

had successfully driven away such a Harsha. *Puḷakēśi*'s original Kannada name was *Erayammā*. It occurs to me that when he became king and adopted the Sanskrit name he took the name *Puḷakēśi* because that was his grandfather's name and also because it was another name for his arch rival Harshavardhan.

The hair has a name '*Alakam*'. *Kubēra*, the Yaksha king and the deity for wealth is called *Alakēsan*. His capital was *Alakāpuri*. Names like *Hrushikēsan*, *Puḷakēśi*, *Alakēsan* indicate such greatness that would make the hairs stand on end.

Puḷakēśi II was cheated by his uncle and therefore lost the right to rule. Later by his extraordinary power he defeated his uncle and ascended the throne. He attained the highest position amongst the *Chāḷukya* kings. With the title *Sathyāśrayan* (the refuge of Sathyam) he had ruled. He forced the great Harshavardan to retreat and confine himself to the north of Narmada.

The great king during that period in the South was the *Pallavā* King, *Mahēndra Varman*. In the drama, *Maththavilāsa Prahasanam* which he wrote, he calls himself as *Mahēndra Vikrama Varman*. He was such a great artiste himself and also a connoisseur of arts that arts of sculpture and music will ever remember him. *Puḷakēśi* invaded the *Pallavā* kingdom and forced *Mahēndra Varma*'s army to confine itself to the fort and thus gained victory.

The defeat at the hands of *Puḷakēśi* became a sore for the *Pallavā* dynasty. *Mahēndra Varman* died before he could retaliate and take revenge. It became possible only during the time of his son, *Narasimha Varman*, who got the name *Māmallan*. He invaded *Vāthāpi* and defeated the *Chāḷukyās*. He marched right into *Vāthāpi* and destroyed it.

We frequently use the term '*kshāthram*'. When one nurtures great enmity towards another and wants to seek revenge it is called *kshāthram*. That is the quality of the *kshathriyās*. Although they

have several great qualities their feeling of enmity becomes *kshāthram* and we see how power spoils the mind.

Kshathriyās have the suffix Varma. The direct meaning of Varmam is armour (*kavacham*). Since the *Kshathriyās* wear the *kavacham* they became *Varmas*. Not only that; they protect the country even at the cost of their own lives and therefore they are *Varmas*. But when we talk of *Varmam* we do not have this aspect in mind but only the feeling of revenge. The *Chālukyās* did not lag behind the *Pallavās* in *kshāthram*. Their only thought was to avenge their defeat and destroy *Kanchipuram*. *Vikramādityā II* who ruled *Vāthāpi* a hundred years after *Narasimha Pallavā* Varma overran *Kānchi*. By that time the *Kailāsanāthar* Temple had come up in *Kānchi*. It is a treasure house of sculpture. If *Vikramādityā* had wanted, his army would have destroyed *Kānchi* and also the *Kailāsanāthar* Temple. But he did not do it. He had received *Siva manthra dikshai*. Whether due to his *Śiva* bhakthi or because he was a connoisseur of arts he did not indulge in such acts. Not only that; when he returned to his place, he had a temple (*Virūpākshar* temple) constructed as an exact replica of *Kailāsanāthar* temple for which he had taken sculptors from *Tamil Nadu* treating them with great honour.

Going back to *Narasimha Varma Pallavā*'s victory over *Vāthāpi* his commander-in-chief in that war was *Paranjōthi*. He belonged to the Brahmin sect of *Mahāmāthrar*. *Mahāmāthrar* were those Brahmins who gave up their Vedhic way of life and took to other worldly activities. *Paranjōthi* belonged to *Tiruchengattānkudi* where there is the *Śiva* temple, *Gaṇapathīśwaram*. He must have been drawn to *Vignēśwarā* bhakthi from his early days. When he returned victorious from *Vāthāpi* along with several things he brought a *Gaṇapathi* from there. After the successful completion of the invasion of the *Chālukya* kingdom *Paranjōthi* underwent a major change of heart in the manner of *Asōka* after the *Kalinga* war. He wanted to quit

the service in the king's army and settle down in the native place and spend his time as a *Śiva* bhaktha. He retired from the king's service with all honours and came to *Tiruchengattānkudi* and installed there the *Gaṇapathi* he brought from *Vāthāpi*. (He came to be called *Śiruthoṇḍa Nāyanār*) There is also a view that the *Gaṇapathi* at *Tiruchengattānkudi* was not brought from *Vāthāpi*. Experts of iconography for example say this on the basis of the features of the idol. One of these experts has said '*Paranjōthi* must have developed great bhakthi to a *Vignēswarā* in *Vāthāpi* over which he had gained victory. Therefore when he settled down in his native place he might have installed *Gaṇapathi*. Since *Vāthāpi* was the cause for the installation, the *Mūrthi* might have come to be called '*Vāthāpi Gaṇapathi*'. There is also another version : It may be true that *Paranjōthi* had brought the *Vignēswarā Mūrthi* from *Vāthāpi* but he might have installed it in *Tiruvārūr* since it is the '*Mūlādhāra Kshēthram*'.

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THE ELEPHANT - FACED AND AGASTHYA

Agasthya Maharishi is very much connected with *Vignēswarā*. Both have huge stomach. Agasthyar is of the size of a thumb. *Pillaiyār* is also described as '*Vāmana rūpam*'.

Vāmana Rūpa Maheswara Puthra

Vigna Vināyaka Pādha Namasthē

'*Vāmana rūpam*' means short. On the one side, he is described as '*Vakrathuṇḍa Mahākāya*'. That is, he has a huge body. On the other he is described as *Vāmana Rūpa*. He is both the small and the big. He is the atom. He is also the infinite universe.

In Hampi there are two large-sized *Vignēswarā Mūrthis*. One is ten feet tall and the other is about twenty feet. But the names of the *Mūrthis* show that one is as small as mustard and the other is as small as dhal. 'The fact is that since he is of the form of *Viṣwarūpa*,

no life size *Mūrthi* can be made which is close to his size. We have made of a size that is possible. When these are compared with the real size, these are like mustard and dhal' they say in all humility.

Agasthya had kept the *Kāvēri* within his *kamaṇḍalu*. It was *Vignēswarā* who went in the form of a crow, toppled it and made the *Kāvēri* flow. At that time, Agasthya became angry but when he realized that it was *Vignēswarā* who had done it he became His great devotee. Now the story about *Vāthāpi*. There were two *asurā* brothers *Vāthāpi* and Illavan. They were fond of human flesh. They were particularly fond of the flesh of rishis made sweet by their bodies being soaked in *Vēdhā manthrās*. But instead of openly killing the rishis they would indulge in deceit and kill the rishis for their food. The elder brother used to approach a rishi in the guise of a Brahmin and invite him for dinner. The rishi would accept the invitation in good faith. Rishis would use their supernatural vision only when absolutely necessary. Therefore they would get cheated. *Vāthāpi* himself would be served as a meal. When the rishi had taken it the elder brother would call *Vāthāpi* to come out. *Vāthāpi* would then take the form of a goat, tear the stomach with the horns and come out and then the brothers would eat the rishi. They tried the same trick with Agasthya. Agasthya was always meditating on *Vignēswarā*. Therefore *Vignēswarā* made him realize the plot. Immediately, Agasthya passed his hand over his stomach and said '*Vāthāpi Jirṇō bhava*'. The *asurā* could not come out but got digested within Agasthya's stomach.

Agasthya performed *pūjā* to *Vignēswarā* who had blessed him to fight *Vāthāpi* and thereby do good to the world. The form in which *Vignēswarā* was at that time came to be known as *Vāthāpi Gaṇapathi*. When Agasthyar went on pilgrimage he went to *Tiruvārūr* and installed *Vāthāpi Gaṇapathi* there. Muthuswāmi *Dikshithar* sang the song *Vāthāpi Gaṇapathim Bhaje* on this *Gaṇapathi* only and not on the *Gaṇapathi* of *Tiruchengattānkudi* as

some people think. In the song the words '*Mūlādhāra Kshēthra*' occur. *Tiruvārūr* which is a pruthvi *Kshēthram* is that *Mūlādhāra Kshēthram*.

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GAJAKARṆĀKAR

The next name is *Gajakarṇākar* which means 'One who has the ears of elephant'. It is as if merely describing him as *Gajamukar* is not enough it has been specially said that the ears are also those of the elephant. What is special about the ears of the elephant?

In the idols of all other *Mūrthis* there will be a quarter circle around the ears and it will be touching the shoulders. The ears of the *Swāmi* will not be easily visible and we will have to search it within that quarter circle and the '*krītam*'. Mostly we can locate the ears only by the kundalam that hangs. *Vignēswarā* is the only deity who is the exception to this. His ears which are of the elephant are spread broadly on either side of its big face.

Is it not necessary that the ears of the Lord have to listen to our prayers? What is the use if those ears are not clearly seen? It is *Vignēswarā* with his elephant ears who has the ears broadly spread out and gives us the encouragement that he is listening very well to our prayers.

For all other animals the ears are shaped like a cup. It is only for the elephant it is flat like a fan. It is of the shape of a cup for other animals to enable them to prevent the sound being dissipated and for sending it inside fully. But since the elephant has got a very sharp ear it has no need to worry about the dissipation of the sound.

When the elephant moves its big ears like a fan it is a beautiful sight. In the animal world it is only the elephant which

can move its ears like a fan. Cattle also may occasionally move their ears slightly to drive away insects but they cannot do it all the time like the elephant. The cattle have to strain very much even to move the ears slightly. But the elephant can do it naturally and effortlessly all the time. Therefore this has got the name 'Gajāspālam' (*Gaja āspālam*). It has been given the name 'Gajathālam'. *Thālam* means the palmyra leaf. That is a fan. The rhythmic beats accompanying music is also called 'thālam'. The elephant keeps moving its fan-like ears in a rhythmic manner as if it is 'thālam'. If human beings can move their ears like the elephant it will be considered a great feat. When something is impossible to be done we usually say that it cannot be done even if one were to do 'Gajakarṇam'. That means it is as difficult as moving the ears like the elephant.

What is so difficult for us *Vignēśwarā* does as a mere play. This is what the name *Gajakarṇakar* shows.

When the elephant keeps moving its ears not only is it beautiful to look at but there is a purpose in it. During the rutting period there will be constant oozing of a fluid on its cheek. Therefore flies and ants will collect there. It is for driving them away God has given the elephant fan-like ears and also the ability to move them like fan.

In *Gaṇeśa* Pancharatnam, *Āchāryā* has referred to the oozing of the fluid on *Vignēśwarā*'s cheek as 'Kapōla dhāna vāranam'. *Kapōlam* means the cheek. *Dhānam* means the fluid that oozes during rutting.

The fluid flows on *Pillaiyār*'s cheeks out of joy and compassion. It will be sweet as amruth. Lot of bees collect there to taste that liquid. *Āchāryā* has referred to this also in *Śivabhujaṅga Sthōthram* :

Galath dhanagandam milath brunga shandam

Pillaiyār keeps moving his fan-like ears to drive away the bees which collect near his cheek. But he is not driving them away in anger. To the child-god this is also a sport. The bees also come near him only for this play. Since his very *dharsan* will be like drinking amruth for them there is no need for them to drink the fluid flowing on the cheek. They collect near the cheek only to play so that he will fan them with his ears. Do we not play with children by making noise into their ears? In the same manner the bees collect there making their own peculiar drone near the *Pillaiyār's* ears. *Pillaiyār* will understand them and move his ears as if to drive them away. In that wind, they will fly away from there and come back again. The breeze produced by the movement of his ears fall on the fluid on the cheek and make him happy with the resulting coolness.

One Raghava Chaithanyar has written a *Mahāgaṇapathi Sthōthram*. In that there are not only secrets of *Manthrā Sāsthrā* but there is also poetic beauty. He has beautifully described the way that *Vignēswarā* moves his ears and plays with the bees as if driving them away.

*Thānāmōdha vinōdha lubdha madhupa prōthsāraṇa (a) virbhavath
Karnā (a) ndhōlana khēlanō vijayathē dhēvō gaṇa grāmanī*

'*Thāna amōdham*' means the sweet smell emanating from the fluid flowing on the cheeks during rutting. The bees become greedy to enjoy that fine smell. They also want to drink that fluid 'Lubdha madhupa' means the bees which are very greedy. Alternately, this can also be understood to mean that the bees which have forgotten themselves in that fine smell. *Swāmi* wants to drive away the bees. '*Prōthsāraṇam*' means drive away or remove. From this thought a sport emerges. '*Khēlanam*' means sport or play. What is that sport? '*Karnāndhōlana khēlanam*'. *Karnā āndhōlanam* means moving the ears forward and backwards.

The swing is called 'āndhōlam'. Mere 'dhōlam' also has the same meaning. The festival of keeping *Swāmi* on the swing and moving the swing is called 'dōlōtsavam'.

When *Vignēśwarā* plays by driving the bees he becomes more beautiful. 'Vijayathē' - He is beautiful, He shines as a victorious hero. He is a victorious hero who has driven away the invading crowd of bees.

Here, *Pillaiyār* has been referred to as 'Gaṇa Grāmaṇi'. 'Grāmaṇi' means the head of a particular group of people. By the word 'Grāmam' we generally understand it to be a village. One who is the headman of the village is a *Grāmaṇi*. One who is the head of the *Śiva gānās* - *Gaṇapathī*, *Gaṇēsan*, *Gaṇāthipan*, *Gaṇanāyakan* has been referred to here as *Gaṇa Grāmaṇi*.

Although he is *Gaṇa Grāmaṇi* who is surrounded by the paraphernalia of *Gaṇās* there is no need for any of them to fan him and He does it himself by moving his ears. That is why he got the name 'Chāmara Karṇar' :

Mūshika vāhana mōdhaka hastha chāmara karṇah

It is because he is *Gajakarṇakar* he can fan himself thus being the cause, the instrument and the doer all by Himself.

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LAMBHĪDHARAR

Lambhōdharar means 'One who has a hanging stomach'. 'Lambham' means what is hanging. 'Udharam' means the stomach. That means he has a big stomach. Europeans refer to *Pillaiyār* only as the pot-bellied god. He is having *mōdhakam* which has inside it 'pūrṇam' (the sweet ball) and has a pot belly to show that He is *pūrṇam* (the whole). It shows perfection. Since it has within it all the planets of the universe it is also of round shape.

In *mōdhakam* the sweet ball (*pūrṇam*) has a flour covering. *Mōdhakam* means joy or what gives joy. *Vignēśwarā* himself is such a *mōdhakam* and He is himself blissful. He is like the *mōdhakam* which gives to everybody the love which is sweet. *Lambōdharar* has the round stomach to show that He has within him the sweet *pūrṇam* of love. For a round thing we cannot speak of a beginning or end. That is why it is a metaphor for Brahman. In order to show that *Lambōdharar* is with the round stomach.

When we see someone with a huge hanging stomach we get a feeling of satisfaction and fullness. It will be so especially when the person with such a stomach is a child. We do not get such joy when we see a puny and bony person. We usually relate the body with qualities. We say that one with a big hanging stomach is a simple and absolutely plain person. Apart from that the very sight of such a person is funny and we feel like laughing. *Pillaiyār* who is Sumukar is with such a stomach in order that all of us can also be laughing and be with sumukam. *Pillaiyār* is as *Lambōdharar* in the thought 'people are caught in various difficulties and are struggling. They may or may not react favourably to philosophical teachings. Therefore let us be in such a manner that they will be able to laugh and be happy the moment they see us'.

It is the children particularly who are very happy in seeing *Garapathi* with the hanging stomach. Appropriately *Purandaradāsar*, when starting the initial lessons in music, sings the *Pillaiyār Gītham* 'Lambhodhara lakumikara'. 'Lakumikara' means 'Lakshmikarā'; one who gives all the sowbhagyam.

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VIKATAR

We all know that 'Vikatam' means 'humour' 'joke', talking in a manner to make people laugh. Such talk will be intelligent also. We refer to such a person as 'Vikatakavi'. In that very name there

is word play. If it is read in the reverse (in Sanskrit) then also it is Vikatakavi.

In Sanskrit dictionary, it will be found that the meaning for the word 'Vikata' is not humour or joke. On the other hand the meanings given would be 'terrible', 'fearful' etc. But in practice we have come to understand this word as making fun, cutting jokes, talking humorously etc. The *Vidhūshaka* of the olden days is the comic character of these days. But according to the dictionary he is 'Prathināyaka'. That is, he is the villain. He is supposed to have a fearful form and indulging in cruel activities.

Researchers used to say that originally *Vināyakā* was a Ugra *Dēvathā* with a fearful figure and it was only later that He was made a Sowmya *Mūrthi*. But we are not concerned with all that research. What we need for gaining the feeling of fullness in life and get happiness in the right way is bhakthi. It is only when there is a *Mūrthi* which can pull back our wavering and foolish mind and keep it steady we feel bhakthi. When we see *Vināyakamūrthi* with His elephant face and huge stomach we get all these and feel bhakthi. This is what we see practically. When we see *Vignēśwarāmūrthi* do we ever feel that we look at someone who is ugly or who is cruel in nature or detestable which make us fear? Whatever the researchers may say let us ignore all that and go by the practice in vogue of accepting Vikatam as creating humour and in that sense consider *Vignēśwarā* as Vikatar.

Vignēśwarā indulges in a lot of Vikatam. When his parents *Pārvathī-Paramēśwarā* develop misunderstanding and pretended anger as a sport *Vināyakā* would indulge in some fun or mischief and bring them together. He will go as a crow, deceive Agasthya in a humorous way and make available *Kāvēri* for us. He will go as a brahmachāri, deceive *Vibhīshanā* and make him install Sri *Rangānāthā* on the banks of *Kāvēri*. He will deceive his brother

Rāvaṇā in *Gōkarṇā Kshēthra* and make him install *Śiva* Lingam. These are all practical jokes played by *Vikatar*. Although such practical jokes resulted in *Agasthya*, *Rāvaṇā* or *Vibhīshaṇā* getting cheated the object of all such play was only the welfare of the world. It is his play of compassion by which he made available *Kāvēri*, *Sri Ranganāthā* and *Kailāsa* Lingam for all people. He achieved all these in a playful way.

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VIKATA VINĀYAKĀS IN SOME HOLY PLACES

In a holy place in *Thanjāvūr* District there is a *Pillaiyār* who is called 'gall nut *Pillaiyār*'. A certain merchant brought a consignment of nutmeg to be traded in that place; nutmeg was taxable. Therefore he gave false declaration at the toll gate that the consignment was that of gall nut. To strengthen his lie he had arranged bags of gall nuts in the front and the rear of the consignments loaded in the carts. Thus he cheated the people at the toll gate and brought his consignment. *Vignēśwarā* will punish people who do wrong. That also he will do in a humorous way. Therefore in the night itself he changed the entire consignment into gall nut. Next morning the merchant realized his mistake and prayed to *Pillaiyār* that if the consignments are again changed to nutmeg he would pay all the taxes and also the penalties. *Pillaiyār* also felt for the condition of the merchant and changed the consignment back to nutmeg. *Mōdaka Pillaiyār* who is sweet came to be known in that place as gall nut *Pillaiyār*.

Sugarcane is just the opposite of gall nut in taste. In *Kumbakōṇam* there is a *Pillaiyār* who is named as 'Thousand sugarcane *Pillaiyār*'. It appears that originally he was known as *Varāha Pillaiyār*. When *Mahā Viṣṇu* took *Varāha avathāram* it is only after praying to this *Pillaiyār* he rescued *Bhūmādevī* from *Hiranyākshan*. One day some one who was taking a cart-load of

sugarcane to the factory happened to stay overnight opposite this *Pillaiyār* temple. He had tied into several bundles one thousand sugarcanes.

Vignēswarā's abode is in the ocean of sugarcane juice. Just like *Kailās* and *Vaikuntam*, he has his own world. That world which is of the form of joy is called *Ānanda Bhuvanam*. *Mahā Vishṇu* is reclining in *Kshīra Sāgaram*. *Ambāl* is in *Maṇi Dwipam* in the middle of *Amrutha Sāgaram*. *Pillaiyār's* *Ānanda Bhuvanam* is surrounded by 'Ikshu Sara Sāgaram', that is ocean of sugarcane juice. That he is very sweet is shown not only by the *mōdakam* which he is having in his hand but also by the ocean of sugarcane juice surrounding him.

Vināyakar who is in the middle of sugarcane ocean played sport by going in the guise of a *brahmachāri* to the cart man who had the sugarcane and asked for one piece. The cart man refused to give him. Those who saw this told the cart man 'You have a whole cart load of sugarcane. That child is asking for one. Can you not give it to the child? The cart man wanted to escape their scolding and gave the excuse that the sugarcane was of a variety which is sour and that only if the juice is taken and jaggery is made it will be sweet. The people who abused him accepted this statement and went away. The *brahmachāri* (*Pillaiyār*) laughed.

On the next day the entire sugarcane tasted sour. The cart man realized it as soon as he unloaded it at the factory. He understood who the *brahmachāri* was who asked for a sugarcane near the *Pillaiyār* temple. He felt deeply for his lapse and prayed to *Pillaiyār*. *Swāmi* also took pity on him and restored the sugarcane to its normal taste. Thus *Varāha Pillaiyār* became 'Thousand Sugarcane *Pillaiyār*'.

There are several stories like this connected with *Pillaiyār's* sporting ways. We learnt from the story of *Avvayār* that He will

shower all blessings even upto *mōksham* very playfully. He had lifted her by his trunk and straightaway dropped her in *Kailāsam*.

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VIKATA CHAKRA VINĀYAKAR

In *Kanchīpuram* itself there is a *Vikata Chakra Vināyakar*. He is in *Kumārakōttam* (*Subrahmaṇya Swāmi* temple). He got this name because he had played some practical joke with his uncle *Mahā Vishṇu*. On a birthday of *Vināyakā*, *Mahā Vishṇu* went to *Kailāsam* with lot of presents. But the child-god discarded all the presents and snatched away the *chakram* (*Sudarsan*) which *Mahā Vishṇu* was holding. When *Mahā Vishṇu* tried to retrieve it from him he put it inside his mouth. Then *Mahā Vishṇu* found a way of getting it out of his mouth. He held his own ears by his four hands and then did doubling up. *Pillaiyār* laughed at it and the *chakram* fell down and *Vishṇu* took it. Because he played this 'vikatam' with *Vishṇu*, the *Vināyakar* came to be called *Vikata Chakra Vināyakar*.

Gajakarnakar drives away the bees by his fan-like ears and makes others laugh. *Lambōdharar* makes the people who look at him laugh immediately because of his hanging stomach.

There is no deity who is better than *Vignēswarā* to make happy the people who struggle in the midst of several difficulties.

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VIGNA RĀJAR

That is *Vignēswarar*. *Vigna Rājā* is *Vigna Īswarā*. We may think that *Īswarā* is above *Rājā*. But if we consider the root meaning we will find that *Īswarā* also does what is being done by *Rājā*. The root 'Īs' means ruling. One who rules is *Īswarā*. In the names of the Lord the word 'Rājā' 'Īswarā' 'Nāthan' all carry the same meaning. We call *Natarājā* as *Natesan*, *Natēswaran*. We call

Rangarājā as *Ranganāthan*, *Rangēsan*. In the same way, *Vigna Rājā* and *Vignēswarar* are same.

It is the name *Vigna Rājā* that shows the exclusive power that *Pillaiyār* has. Brahma is for creation; *Vishṇu* is for protection; Rudra is for destruction; Durga is for victory; Lakshmi is for wealth; Saraswathi is for learning; Dhanvanthri is for the cure of diseases - *Paramēswarā* has allotted these various functions to different deities in his kingdom of universe. What is the office of *Pillaiyār*? It is removal of obstacles. It is only for avoiding obstacles to any of our undertakings we pray to *Vignēswarā* in the very beginning. *Vignēswarā* or *Vigna Rājā* is the form that the Supreme Being has taken for the removal of obstacles.

When it is said that he is *Īswarā* for vīgam or *Rājā* for vīgam it should not be understood that He is the chief for creating the obstacles. He is *Vigna Rājā* because He destroys the obstacles.

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NOBLE PURPOSE IN CREATING OBSTACLES TOO

He has created obstacles now and then. When *Paramasīvā* went for Thripura *Samhāram* he did not think of *Vignēswarā* and therefore *Vignēswarā* made the axle of *Paramēswarā*'s chariot break. It is only to make it clear to the world that people should obey the law that He made the axle break. It is only for teaching humility he creates obstacles occasionally. Therefore those who are affected at that time never meet with bad fate at the end. It is because *Vignēswarā* who created the obstacle will make the affected person realize 'we have forgotten the deity specially appointed in the rule of *Parāśakthi* for removal of obstacles and thought we could manage everything ourselves and that is why this problem has cropped up' and the affected person will pray to Him and *Vigna Rājā* will respond to his prayer and bless him doubly.

'PERSONAL' EXPERIENCE

Leaving aside examples from *Purāṇās* I shall now narrate two of our own experiences.

We had been to Vellore. Near Vellore there are powerful idols of *Gaṇapathi* in a place called *Sheṇṇpākkam*. There are eleven such *Pillaiyārs*. The speciality about them is that they were not sculpted but all of them are 'swayambu' *Mūrthi* (self-manifested). There are eleven Rudras (*Ēkādaśa Rudrās*). In this place there are *Ēkādaśa Vināyakās*. The formation of all the eleven idols is like *Prāṇavam*.

It appears that, in between, all the idols remained buried under the ground. Perhaps to show that He is the *Mūrthi* for *Pruthivī Thathvam*, *Vignēswarā* had indulged in this play! It appears *Thukoji* who was a minister in the then Maratha kingdom was passing that way during night in his horse-drawn carriage. Suddenly the axle broke and the carriage stopped. When he got down and looked on the ground he saw blood stain. But no person could be seen. He could not understand what had happened and remained there the whole night. Since the carriage could be repaired only in the morning he had to remain there. He was sad that such an obstacle had come in his tour and therefore prayed to *Vignēswarā* and went to sleep. *Vignēswarā* appeared in his dream and told him, 'My *Ēkādaśa Mūrthis* are buried in that place. Since the wheels of your carriage hit against them blood had come out. But you do not worry about it. It is because I myself willed that it was enough that I had remained buried and that it was time for a temple to come up there for the benefit of all people. Construct a temple there, perform *Kumbābhishēkam* and earn *puṇyam*'. *Thukoji* became very happy and did as commanded by *Vignēswarā*.

We were going in a procession near that temple. What happened then was

Junior *Swāmigaḷ* (*Jagadguru Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swāmigaḷ*) was coming seated on an elephant. That elephant did not move beyond that place and kept circling there only. Inspite of all that the Mahut and others did to pacify it, it continued to behave in the same way. All of us were worried because Sri *Swāmigaḷ* was seated on the elephant and lot of people had gathered.

It was then that suddenly I remembered that nearby in *Sherṇpākkam* there is *Pillaiyār*. We had made a vow to break 108 coconuts for Him but just at that time that was forgotten.

What does it mean by saying that it was forgotten? It only means that it was our carelessness. We did not forget to accept offerings of garlands, *pūrṇakumbam*, the people's *namaskāram* etc and go in a procession. Can we forget only what we were to offer to *Pillaiyār*? Is it not carelessness? I understood that the Lord had done this to teach a lesson that those who were required to create 'śraddhā' and 'bhakthi' in people should not themselves be careless like this. I also thought that because even if some difficulty had been caused to me I would not mind it so much, the obstacle was created through the elephant on which Junior *Swāmigaḷ* came. But Junior *Swāmigaḷ* was not afraid and kept his cool. The fear and the lesson is only for me who had made the vow to break the coconuts and the assistants who were aware of it.

Immediately, the coconuts were broken for the *Pillaiyār* and the elephant became all right and started moving in the normal way. This is what we had actually experienced. Later, one day, we did special *abhishēkam* and *pūjā* to *Pillaiyār*.

By breaking coconuts or doing *abhishēkam* we do not make him gain something new or become happy. He is always bliss personified and always fully satisfied. By making us do such *pūjās* to him He blesses us with happiness and spiritual gain.

It is true that if any activity is conducted without any obstacle there is a satisfaction. But there is greater satisfaction and happiness when an obstacle comes up and then it is remedied and the action is done successfully. It is only when there is hot sun you realize the greatness of shade. It is only when jari (silver thread) is attached to a black cloth, it shines brightly. In the same way it is only when an undertaking is completed along with vignam there is greater satisfaction.

Apart from the successful completion of the activity what is special is that the joy is born out of bhakthi. We realize 'Although we forget the great *Swāmi* - who does not need anything but who satisfies all our needs - He does not forget our small prayer and makes us realize that we can do nothing without His blessings and in the name of creating obstacles He bestows His blessings'. *Vigna Rājā* removes the obstacles. Occasionally, He creates the obstacles only to remove them later.

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VINĀYAKAR; DOUBLE PILLAIYĀR

Vigna Rājō Vināyakah - The name *Vināyakar* comes next to *Vigna Rājar*.

There is the practice of installing two *Pillaiyārs* side-by-side for worship. In several places there are streets which are called 'Double-*Pillaiyār* Koil Street'. In such temples in one sannidhi itself two *Pillaiyārs* will be seated side-by-side. Even in some *Śiva* temples there are double *Pillaiyārs*.

It does not appear that there is the practice of installing a pair of any other *Mūrthi* for worship. This is exclusive for *Pillaiyār*.

The reason for this is that He does two things which appear to us to be opposed to each other. Of the two one is *Vigna Rājar*

and the other is *Vināyakar*. The two things which he does are - one to create obstacles and the other is to remove the obstacles. These two appear to be opposed to each other. Earlier I have said 'When we talk of *Vignēswarar* and *Vigna Rājā* we should not take it to mean that He is the *Īswarā* or *Rājā* for creating obstacles. Just as *Īswarā* and *Rājā* are there to destroy what is bad he destroys obstacles which is bad and therefore he has that name'. When we worship Him generally as *Vignēswarā* we should have only this attitude.

But when there are '*Double Pillaiyār*', *Vigna Rājā* who is first of them should be understood as one who creates obstacles. Since He is expert in creating vignams He should be considered *Vigna Rājā*. It is when He removes the vignam, He becomes *Vināyakar*.

When it is said that He is creating obstacles would it mean that He is an unkind *Swāmi*? It is not so. That is why I said that the two acts of creating Vignam and removing it are not actually opposed to each other but 'they appear to be opposed to each other'. The substance of both these activities is only one which is anugraham (bestowing grace). It has taken two forms; one as vignam and the other as removal of that vignam. Therefore, basically, there is nothing opposed to each other.

If it is asked whether creating obstacles is anugraham the explanation is : We have done a lot of bad *karmā* and come with a huge baggage. Still, because of a little blessing of the Lord, we have bhakthi to *Pillaiyār* and pray to Him that whatever we undertake should succeed without obstruction.

But simply because we have prayed like this would it be all right if He overlooks our entire previous load and makes us succeed in our efforts? However considerate and compassionate He may be, will it be all right if the entire previous *karmā* is cancelled? If that is done how will people have fear of committing sins? Will not *dharmā*, justice etc come to mean nothing? Will not

people think 'We can do whatever we want or we might have done anything but if we do *pūjā* to *Pillaiyār* now, it is enough. All the wrongs would get cancelled out?'

It is to prevent such a thing happening that He, as *Vigna Rājā*, creates *Vignam*. When it is said 'He creates', He does not do it unfairly just to trouble us. Because of our previous *karmā* it would be that we will not succeed in our efforts. Therefore what appears to be a *vignam* caused by Him will actually be because of our old wrongs. That will certainly obstruct our efforts. If it is caused by itself there will be lot of trouble. Because of the obstruction the effort will be completely spoiled and we will face defeat or we may be enabled to succeed in small things here and there and face defeat in a big way in something more important. *Vigna Rājā* takes upon Himself the obstructions which are to result from our previous *karmā* and just as flood waters are controlled by a dam and the flow regulated *Vignēswarā* channelises the obstacles. Not only channelises it but also makes it dry up to some extent. A big obstacle may come as a form of revenge at a later time. He brings it now itself, makes it small and enables us to bear it now. Is it not good that the old *karmā* gets cleared as quickly as possible? The more it gets delayed will we not add fresh baggage of sins? *Vignēswarā* actually prevents this by creating an obstacle for us which may appear to be bad but in reality will do good.

In His *Ashtōthram* the two names *Vigna Karthā* (one who causes obstacles) and *Vigna Harthā* (one who destroys the obstacles) come one after the other. Of these, *Vigna Rājā* comes first and *Vināyakar* comes next.

Vināyakar means a chief who is great. All the deities are 'Nāyakar'. They would have countered something bad done by an *asurā* or *rākshasā* and done good. Because of that they have become 'Nāyakar'. But how has *Vināyakā* become greater than the other *Nāyakās*? He not only removes the cruelties inflicted by

asurās but He removes the obstacles that He Himself creates as *Vigna Rājā*. Since as *Nāyakā* He excels Himself He gets the name *Vināyakar*.

Just as we say *Vignarājar* we also say *Vignavināyakar* - *Vignavināyaka Pādha Namasthe*.

We can also take it that one who creates the obstacles is a great *Nāyakar*.

* * *

THE FAMOUS NAME

One of the well known names of *Pillaiyār* is *Vināyakar*. This name is more famous in the South than in the North. We refer to '*Pillaiyār* Chaturthi' as '*Vināyaka* Chaturthi'. In the North, they refer to it as Ganesh Chaturthi. In the temples of the South, *Vināyakā* will have such names as Siddhi *Vināyakar*, Vara Siddhi *Vināyakar*, *Śelva Vināyakar*, *Śwētha Vināyakar* etc.

The name is *Vi-Nāyakar*. *Nāyakar* means a chief who has several others under his control.

In the South the word '*Nāyakar*' is the name of a *jāthi*. The word *Nāyakā* having the meaning 'a chief' was common to people of all the *jāthis*. In Maharashtra there are *Nāyaks* who are Brahmins. In the *Nāyak* dynasty of *Thanjāvūr* and Madurai they belong to the royal clan. The *Nāyakkars* who came to Tamil Nadu from the Kannada region and those who are called Naidus in Andhra (the term Naidu is also a derivative of the root *Nāyakā*) also belong to the fourth *varṇa*. In *Kēraḷā* they call them Nairs. In Tamil Nadu we call the well-known *Saivaite* saints as *Nāyanmār* all of whom belong to different *jāthis*. We call the *Vysyās* as 'Chettys'. It is '*Śrēshti*' which has become Chetty - meaning that they are *Śrēshtās*, those who are noble. This has become '*sēth*' in the North and '*Shetty*' in Kannada. These names show that people were

performing different kinds of duties without jealousy or rivalry and each *jāthi* felt it was first and great and took pride in belonging to that *jāthi*.

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THE QUALIFYING LETTER 'Vi'

In the word *Vināyakar* the first letter is 'V'. It is clear that the name *Nāyakar* is appropriate to *Pillaiyār* because He is the chief of the *Śiva Gaṇās*. When there is the letter 'V' before it what does it mean?

Of the prefixes that are added to words in Sanskrit, 'V' is one. The significance of this 'V' is that depending upon the word following it, it can change its meaning. For example, 'Malam' means dirt. If 'V' is prefixed to this word it becomes 'Vimalam' which means pure. Here the prefixing of 'V' results in the opposite meaning. But if 'V' is added to the word '*Śuddham*' it becomes *Viśuddham* which means very pure. We often use the word '*Viparītham*'. *Parītham* means going about in a proper manner. '*Viparītham*' means going in the wrong way. *Jayam* means victory. *Vijayam* means victory of a special kind.

Let us take even the word '*Viśesham*'. We know that '*Śēsham*' means what is left over. That is also correct. But there is another meaning which is much higher. What does not mix with others and remains aloof because of its own greatness is also '*Śēsham*'. We refer to great persons as '*Śishta*'. The word '*Śishta*' is derived from the word '*Śēsha*'. Those who are not one among the average people in the society but are distinguished and therefore apart from others are *sishta*.

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VI-NĀYAKAR IN TWO MEANINGS

When we say Vi + *Nāyakar* will that 'Vi' give the opposite meaning or make it more exalted? It is both. It may be surprising but I shall tell you how.

Dhavan means 'Pathi'. *Mādhavan* means the Pathi of *Mā* that is *Mahālakshmi*. '*Vidhavā*' means one has no pathi. In the same manner *Vināyakar* means one who does not have a chief above him. He is the chief of every one. There is no one above him. Therefore He is *Vi-Nāyakar* who does not have a chief above him.

A devotee went to *Bhagawān* and told him 'I am '*anāthan*' but you are also like that'. The Lord asked him 'Do you say that I am *anāthan*?' The devotee replied 'Yes. If I am without a '*nāthan*' who will protect me and therefore I am *anāthan*, you do not have a '*nāthan*' above you. Therefore you are a-*nāthan*'.

Vināyakar has no one greater than him and is the chief. Here 'Vi' gives the opposite meaning.

As opposed to this 'Vi' also shows his exalted status. He is not an ordinary *Nāyakar* but a *Nāyakar* who is something special and great. Both ways this name is appropriate to him.

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THE NAMES OF PILLAIYĀR IN AMARAM

In *Amarakōsam* when mentioning the names of *Vignēswarā* it starts with the name *Vināyakar*. If in our *sāsthrās* sixteen names have been mentioned as important, in *Amarakōsam* which was written by Amarasimha who was a Jain there are only eight names :-

Vināyakō, Vignarājā, Dwaimāthura, Gañādhīpā
Ap-Ēkadanta, Hēramba, Lambōdhara, Gajānanah

The six names which are mentioned here namely *Vināyakā, Vigna Rājā, Ēkadanta, Hēramba, Lambōdhara* and *Gajānana* are also in our *Shōdasanāma*. The name *Gañādhīpā* mentioned here appears as *Gañādhyaksha* in the *Shōdasanama*. The only name which is not in *Shōdasanāmā* but in Amaram is *Dwaimathura*. It means He has two mothers. *Ambāl* is one and the other is *Gangā*.

Since *Subrahmaṇya* manifested in the *Saravaṇa* pond in Ganges out of the sparks that came out of *Śiva*'s eyes, *Gangā* is like direct mother to *Subrahmaṇya*. That is why He is called *Gāṅgēyan*. Although *Pillaiyār* does not have such a direct connection with *Gangā* since *Gangā* is on his father's head and having the status of his 'pathni', She is also referred to as *Pillaiyār*'s mother. I wanted to say that in Amaram the name *Vināyakā* appears as the first among all the names of *Pillaiyār*. If in a dictionary a particular name appears as the first among the names of a deity it means that name is important.

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DHŪMAKĒTHU

Dhūmam means smoke. The ordinary smoke that comes from firewood, charcoal etc is *dhūmam*. But sweet-smelling smoke like that of 'sambrani' and other incense etc is to be called as 'dhūpam'. In *Panchōpacharā* we offer *dhūpam*. *Dhūmam* is smoke. *Kēthu* means flag. One who has smoke as the flag is *Dhūmakēthu*. Since the smoke that comes out of fire rises up and spreads giving the impression of a fluttering flag, Agni *Bhagawān* has the name *Dhūmakēthu*. But generally the term *Dhūmakēthu* is not understood as something good but as being bad. The reason is *Dhūmakēthu* also means a comet. Appearance of a comet is an inauspicious sign. It was difficult to understand why *Pillaiyār* who is '*Mangalamūrthi*' should have such a name.

I looked into *Vināyaka Purāṇā*. There are two *Purāṇās* about *Vināyakā*. One is that of Bruhu Maharishi. Therefore it is called '*Bārgava Purāṇam*'. Other *Purāṇam* of a rishi called '*Mudgalār*' is called *Mudgala Purāṇam*. But my reference to *Dhūmakēthu* is in *Bārgava Purāṇam*.

There are two parts in that *Purāṇam* namely *Upāsanākandam* and *Lilākandam*. In *Lilākandam* twelve different

avathārās of *Vignēswarā* have been mentioned in a wonderful way and each has been given a name. According to this *Ganēsar* is one *avathāram* and *Gaṇapathi* is another. *Vakrathuṇḍar*, *Bhālachandrar* and *Gajānanar* which are in *Shōdasanāmā* are also the names of different *avathārs*. In that there is a story about the *avathāram* as *Dhūmakēthu*. It is only after reading that it was clear why he got this name. I had looked into this *Purāṇam* long ago. I shall narrate it briefly to the extent I remember.

There was an *asurā* by name *Dhūmāsuran*. Just like *Vruthāsura*, *Mahābhali* and others who are talked about in *Bhagavatham*, some *asurās* have great qualities and bhakthi also. But their '*asurā*' nature will be predominant. *Dhūmāsurā* was one such. There was a king at that time whose wife was in the family way. *Dhūmāsurā* came to know that a son who will be born to that queen as an aspect of *Mahā Vishṇu* would be the cause of his death. Therefore he ordered his commander-in-chief to go to the king's palace during the night and kill the queen. But when the commander-in-chief went to the palace he did not feel like killing a noble lady especially when she was pregnant. He also did not want to separate the couple. Therefore he carried away the cot on which both were sleeping and left them in the midst of a forest. There both of them kept praying to *Vināyakā* that He should remove their sufferings, bless the queen with safe delivery and enable them return to the kingdom.

Dhūmāsurā learnt that they were hiding inside the forest. Immediately he himself went there with weapons. The weapon in which he had specialized was smoke. Was he not *Dhūmāsurā*? He was expert in firing an *asthrā* which would emit poisonous fumes.

These days also we have different types of gases from the tear gas which is harmless to the gas-shell which is a killer. What is being done these days by using chemicals was done by *manthrā sakthi* in the olden days.

When he wanted to kill a pregnant lady with her husband he found that already he had a child on her lap. It was *Pillaiyār* who responded to their continued prayers and took birth as an aspect of *Vishṇu*. By this He showed that He is of the form of all *dēvathās*. When it is said that the son of *Śiva* was born as an aspect of *Vishṇu* the cordiality between *Śaiva* and *Vaishṇava* gets highlighted. The *slokā* ‘*Śuklāmbharatharam Vishṇum*’ comes in the very beginning.

When *Dhūmāsuran* fired his *dhūmāsthram* continuously, cloud-like smoke went towards them. The child *Pillaiyār* absorbed all that within himself. Finally the *asurā* was so tired that he could not fire any more *asthrā*. At that time *Pillaiyār* decided to destroy him. He thought ‘There is no need to fire any new *asthrām* for this purpose. We can use the poisonous gas which he had fired and which I have collected and kept within myself and finish the job’. Immediately he ejected all the smoke that he had collected within himself. It attacked *Dhūmāsurā* and destroyed him.

Pillaiyār who gained victory by losing *Dhūmam* as the weapon got the name *Dhūmakēthu*.

Dhūmam is also called *Dhumram*. *Dhūmakēthu* also is called *Dhūmrakēthu*. *

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GAṆĀDHYAKSHAR

The name next to *Dhūmakēkthu* is *Gaṇādhyaṅkshar*. *Gaṇa* - adhyakshar. Adhyakshar means one who supervises, one who is the chief. (It is only with reference to the head Englishmen also talk of the Head of the government, head-priest etc.)

Gaṇādhyaṅkshar has the same meaning as *Gaṇa* - pathi, *Gaṇēsar* (*Gaṇa* - *Īsar*), *Gaṇādhipathi* (*Gaṇa* - *ādhipathi*), *Gaṇa* - *nādhār*.

Paramēswarā kept *Vignēswarā* as the chief of his *Bhūthagarṇās* and the younger son *Subrahmaṇya* as the chief of the

Dēvagaṇās. We say 'Gajānanam, Bhūthagarīathi Sēvitham'. We call the younger son *Dēvāsēnādhipathi*. He is like that in two ways. He is the chief of the army of the *Dēvās* and he is also the pathi of *Dēvēndrā's* daughter *Dēvāsēnā*. Controlling the *Bhūthagarīās* is more difficult than being the chief of the *Dēvās*. The elder son discharges this responsibility with ease and remains happy in that.

The *Dēvagaṇās* and the *Manushyagaṇās* (human beings) realize his great power and compassion and worship him. Therefore when it is said he is *Gaṇādhyakshar* it can be understood to mean that he is the adhyakshar for all beings.

(* *Gaṇēsa* thanthras say that in every yuga, *Vignēswarā* has a name and form. They say that the name for Kaliyuga is *Dhūmakēthu* (*Dhūmrakēthu*). Consistent with this name he will be of the colour of smoke. He will have only two hands and will ride a horse. In Kruthayugam the name is *Vināyakar*, the colour is of *jyōthi*, hands are ten and the vehicle is lion. In *Thrēthāyugam* the name is *Mayūrēṣar*, colour is white, hands are six and the vehicle is peacock. In *Dwāparayugam*, the name is *Gajānanar*, colour is red, hands are four and the vehicle is *mūshikam*.)

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BHĀLACHANDRAR

We have to carefully note how this name is pronounced. It is *Phālachandrar*. The first letter is 'Pha' and not 'Bha'. These days many people keep the name *Bālachandran*. It is not known what they mean by this name. Possibly they may be thinking that it is the name of 'young chandra', just like the names *Bālakrishnan*, *Bālasubramanian* etc. Since for both these *Mūrthis* there are lots of *līlā* of their early years they have these names. In *Vālmīki* Ramayana there is no description of any '*bāla līlā*' (play of the younger years of Rama). Even in the chapter which talks about the *avathāram* Dasaratha starts thinking about the marriage of the four

sons and at that time *Viśwāmīthra* comes. That is why there is no 'Bāla' Raman just like *Bālakrishnan*. The moon (Chandran) also does not have much of *līlā* of younger years. The third phase moon used to be called *Bhālachandran*. That is not a complete form. Therefore it is not auspicious to keep that name.

Till recent times when fashionable names came to be kept the practice of having the names 'Chandran' was not prevalent in the South. But the practice of writing the name Ramachandran as R.Chandran was there to some extent. There was also the practice to call Ramachandran, Chandramouli etc as Chandru, Chandar etc.

On the whole it has not been the tradition in the South to keep name after any of the *Navagrahās* excepting the Sun. For example no one keeps the name as 'Angarakan' or 'Budhan'. But when somebody is called Bruhaspathi it is for making fun of him. There is no name as Sukran also. What about Sani? (*Periyavā* has hearty laughter). It is used only for abusing people. There is no name as *Rāhu* and *Kēthu*. The tradition is only to keep the name of the Sun. That also is combined with *Mahā Viśhṇu* and the name Suryanarayanan is kept. As the direct name of the Sun there is only the name Bhaskaran in the South. In the North people have such names as Ravi, Divakar, Prabhakar, *Ādhitya*, Marthand etc. These days such names are being kept in the South also. *Sūryamūrthi* is among the *Panchāyathana Mūrthis*. Of the Shanmathas founded by *Āchāryā*, Souram (religion which considers the Sun as the Supreme God) is one. Therefore there is exception for him. But there is no exception for the moon. But the name *Bālachandran* has been kept for a long time and these days it is more. But this is not the name of Chandran (moon).

It may look funny; *Bālachandran* is neither the name of the moon nor is it the way we spell it and pronounce it.

Phālachandran - It is the second 'phā' of the Sanskrit alphabet. That is the correct name. Phalam means the front part of

the hair on the head. *Phālachandran* means one who has the moon as the front portion of the hair of the head.

Phālachandran has the same meaning as *Chandraśekaran*, *Chandramouli* etc.

When it is said one who is keeping the moon on his head we immediately understand it is *Paramaśivā*. But this speciality is there for two others also. One is *Ambāl*. *Kālidāsā* says (In *Śyamala Darīdakam*) '*Chandrakalā Vadamse*'. *Āchāryā* also when he prays to Her says with a tinge of humour that She not only has taken the left part of Her pathi but it appears She has robbed the whole of Her pathi, he refers to the fact that the moon is on Her crown by the word '*Śaśi chūdāla Makutam*' (*Ślōkā* 23 of *Soundaryalahari*). In (Lalitha) *Sahasranamam* also there is the description '*Chāruchandra Kalādharā*'. It is not only *Paramēśwarā*'s pathni who has the moon on her head but the eldest son too.

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PILLAIYĀR AND THE MOON

Vignēśwarā has connection with the moon in several ways. In the thought that he is very beautiful Chandran made fun of him. He, therefore, cursed him : 'Hereafter nobody will look at you. If they look at you they will become victims of unnecessary blame'. After that the people started abusing the moon. They abused him saying 'If we see him by mistake we have to become victims of blame in our place. Why can't he go away somewhere so that we will not see him.' Chandran became ashamed and therefore hid himself in the ocean. If the moon is above the ocean on the New Moon day and the Full Moon day, the ocean will rise and there will be wind and rain which will be helpful to the world. Now that has been affected. Since herbs will grow only when there is moon light they all perished. Diseases increased. Therefore the *Dēvās* and *Rishis* told Chandran 'There is no need for you to live like this in

hiding. There is no need for the world also to suffer without you. *Vignēśwarā* who is compassionate will revoke the curse and people also will be happy. Go and seek His pardon'. Having suffered, the moon became wise and followed their advice. *Pillaiyār* who is compassionate pardoned him but still in order to show to the world that no one should feel proud about oneself and make fun of others he said that only on the day of Chaturthi thithi which is the day of his manifestation the moon should not be seen and can be seen on other days. Because of his compassion he further relaxed it and said that even those who see the moon on that day by mistake can clear the 'dhōsham' by reciting the 'Śyamanthakamaṇi upākṛyānam'. More than all these he also said that at the end of *Śankatahara Chaturthi pūjā* for him, *pūjā* should be done to Chandran also. On top of all this, He has kept the moon on his head and became *Phālachandran*.

The fourth 'bha' of the Sanskrit alphabet can also be used instead of 'Pha'. *Bhālam* means the place above the forehead. *Vignēśwarā* is having the moon at that place. The name *Bhālachandran* shows *Vignēśwarā's* compassion and his quality of pardon. One who did a wrong and actually deserved to be kicked has been kept on his head once he sought his pardon. The name *Bhālachandra* indicates this.

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GAJĀNANAR

THE GREAT QUALITIES OF THE ELEPHANT

Gajānanar means the elephant-faced. The elephant has several great characteristics, - Physical strength, intelligence, particularly memory and *jñānam*. It can pound a man to a paste in no time. But it is subjecting itself to him and serves him by lifting

huge logs of wood, destroying the enemies in a war, breaking the doors of a fort etc; the quality of hard work; eating only sathvik vegetarian food; even after its death its tusk will fetch lot of money - like this it has countless great qualities.

It is the only animal which has a trunk in the place of the hand. Can any other animal fan the Lord in the manner that the elephant does? Can they offer obeisance in the manner in which the elephant does by lifting up its trunk?

Other animals can only kick somebody down; they cannot take them and have them seated on them. It is only the elephant that can embrace with love anyone and give him a high status by keeping him on itself. To be possessed with great strength and a huge body is particularly great. Even if someone stands on its way it will not kick him down unless it feels that there is no other go. Otherwise it will lift him with the trunk and safely drop him at the side.

It has a name 'Dwipam'. Dwi-pam means drinking twice and eating twice. How does the elephant become Dwipam? First it takes water or any food by its trunk and then puts it into its mouth. Unlike other animals which take the food or water directly by the mouth the elephant takes it in the manner of human beings. Therefore it is Dwipam. But when it ejects the food, out if it is solid it will eject it out through the mouth only. If it is water then it will force it out through the trunk just like fountain. There is a great philosophical truth in this. If we have to take something we have to think about it more than once and then take it. But if something is to be thrown out it should be thrown out in one push. Elephant shows this truth by being a Dwipam.

Someone has written a very interesting thing. There is no instrument which is not available these days but there is none which can pick up a minute needle and also a huge teakwood beam. In God's creation it is the elephant's trunk which does both. He has

written that *Pillaiyār* is Gajamukar because he is capable of managing both small and big.

The world itself is kept in position by eight elephants in the eight directions. They are called ashta-dhig-gaja. This is physical strength. For intellectual ability also it is only ashta-dhig-gajam. Just as for the administration of a government eight statesmen are kept, some kings have kept eight great scholars in their learned assembly. *Krishna Dēvarāya* had kept like this. Such great scholars used to be called ashta-dhig-gajam.

More than all this, is its beauty combined with a commanding look. Its pace of walking is specially lauded as 'Gajagathi'. Gajagathi has in it both the masculine and the feminine. That is why it is the practice to describe the pace of men with commanding looks by comparing it to Gajagathi, the grace of the walk of noble ladies is also compared to Gajagathi and they are described as *Gajagāmini*.

Not only it is beautiful and commanding. When someone sits on it he also gets a lustre because of the elephant's commanding beauty. That is why people are taken in procession by having them seated on an elephant. Sri *Rāmachandramūrthi* by himself had a commanding look and beauty. But the ministers and the people who wanted to see him made king tell Dasaratha 'We want to see the procession in which he comes on an elephant' (*Gajēna Mahathā yāntham* - Ayodhyakandam Sargam II - *Śloka* 22). They also tell him that above Rama's face there should be the royal umbrella - *Gajēna Mahathā yāntham Rāmam* - *Chathra vruthānanam*. For our elephant-god the *dēvōtful* offering of umbrella is important. We always bring an umbrella along with *Pillaiyār* and then do *pūjā*.

When *Vibhūthi* or a *Thiruman* (the mark the *Vaishṇāvās* wear on the forehead) is applied on the broad forehead of the black elephant, how beautiful it is! Is there any other animal like this?

We think that pearl comes out from the shell. Rarely however it also comes up in some other places. Pearls come up inside the bamboo also. But the highest class of pearl comes from the raised corners of the elephant's forehead called 'Gajakumbam'.

Another greatness is what is divine. The elephant's face is an abode of *Mahālakshmi*. The inside of lotus flower, the rear side of the bilva leaf, the center where the hair is parted on the heads of a sumangali, the rear side of the cow and the face of the elephant are the five which are considered auspicious since Lakshmi remains there all the time.

If there is such greatness for the elephant's face the hair on its tail is not also without greatness. That hair is a great protection against evil spirits. It also gives health. That is why it is kept in a ring like a gem and it is worn as a jewel. It becomes a jewel and at the same time a protective armour. Generally, it is the nail and the hair which are considered to have *dhōsham*. Those who indulge in evil doings with the help of evil-spirits use these. They have no *dhōsham* as long as they are on the body. The moment the hair falls away from the body or a nail is cut it should be thrown far away. But as an exception the hair of the elephant is a remedy for such evil acts done through spirits. It is the same with regard to the nail of the tiger. If we see the picture of Krishna (of *Thanjāvūr*) we will find that *Swāmi* also has a chain in which there is tiger nail.

* * *

ANIMALS WHICH HAVE DIVINE LINKS

In our Mutt, daily *pūjā* is conducted for two animals. One is Go (cow) *Pūjā* and the other is *Gaja Pūjā*. Of the two, we do not treat the cow as an animal but treat her as the mother only. Therefore, it is only *Gaja pūjā* which is done for an animal. For no other animal, there is such *Pūjā*. When the day is commenced it is

'Gō' Pūjā. In the evening, it is *Gaja Pūjā*. In *Gaja Pūjā* the elephant is offered fruits with all respect and we make it do 'Chāmaram' (waving the fan) to *Āchāryā* (*Āchāryā*'s paduka (holy sandals). The daily accounts are read before him. Finally, when we do *namaskāram* the elephant also lifts its trunk and offers obeisance and makes the noise of victory (Jaya gōsham).

In *Gō Pūjā* we stop with doing *pūjā* to the cow. But in *Gaja pūjā* not only we do *pūjā* to the elephant but the elephant also does *pūjā*.

All big temples keep elephants. In the temples of *Kēraḷā* like that of Trichur, the elephants are more prominent than the Lord during festivals. It has so much divine link. Did it not make the Lord come down from *Vaikuṇṭam* by crying out 'ādhi Mūlam'. Among the animals the elephant has the biggest body and has all other great qualities. It is for this reason when *Paramāthmā* decided to take a form which will be inclusive of all beings he selected elephant from the animal species.

* * *

ONE WHO HAS WITHIN HIMSELF ALL THE BEINGS

All the beings are within Him. Since He is the deity who is worshipped mainly it is obvious that he belongs to the *Dēva* species. The quality of a deity is that it should always have the power to bestow blessings. *Pillaiyār* has this quality in full measure.

He is also of the *Bhūtha* species because of his stomach, short legs etc which are characteristic of the species.

It is only human beings who take cooked food. The animals eat either raw, greens and plants or raw meat. The *asurās* and *rākshasās* eat raw meat. They are called 'kravyādhār'. *Kravyam* means raw meat.

Even when we offer different food varieties as *āhuthi* to the *Dēvās* they eat only the spirit of those foodstuffs. It is only the human species which eat the food that is cooked. *Vignēswarā* eats *mōdakam* which is cooked twice. Rice flour is first cooked to make the covering for the *mōdakam*. It is cooked again after covering the *pūrṇam* with the flour. Sometimes the *mōdakam* is also fried in ghee for greater ritual purity. When *mōdakam* is offered as *āhuthi* during *Gaṇapathi* Homam it is fried in ghee. When it is not homam but we do *pūjā* to the form of *Pillaiyār* then we offer only cooked eatables. He is called 'Mōdaka Hastha' and He is the only *Swāmi* who is keeping a sweetmeat in his hand. Krishna who came in our midst in human form is keeping butter in his hand and embracing the pot of butter. Apart from that, butter is not cooked food. When we offer honey and flour to *Subrahmaṇya*, these also are not cooked food. *Annapūrṇēswari* has in her hand 'pāyasam' (*khīr*). That is not for Her but to be given to us. It is only *Vignēswarā* who takes cooked food himself and gives us also cooked food.

Thus he wanted to show within himself the species of *Dēva*, *Bhutha* and the human. If it is human species all people are having the same form. Similarly for *Dēvās* and *Bhūthās* also generally they have the same form. But when we consider the animal species we find that there are so many forms in that. When this is so if he had selected the form of elephant it is because of its great qualities.

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THE OUTLINE OF THE ORIGINAL

On top of all these there is another thing. *Paramāthmā* wanted to take a form through which He would show that He is the root and the original of everything and everyone should worship him in that form. What is the root of all the creation? The root of all creation is *Praṇavam*. Of all beings and creatures, it is only the face of the elephant with its trunk turned to the right which has the form of *Praṇavam*. It is because of this great feature that He is as *Gajānanar*.

THE FACE AND THE MOUTH

In the word '*Gajānana*' '*Ānanam*' means the face. In Amaram several synonyms have been mentioned for the face like '*Vakthrāsyam*', '*Vadhānam*' '*Thuṇḍam*' '*Ānanam*' '*Lapanam*' '*Mukam*' - each of this refer to the face only.

When on this subject I feel that the view that in Sanskrit there is no separate word for the mouth and that the word for the face also refers to the mouth is not correct. '*Vāk*' '*Vachanam*' etc refer to speech. Because of this the one who speaks is called a *Vakthā* and what is spoken is *Vakthavyam*. Therefore *Vakthram* also would indicate only the mouth. *Vadhānam* also would indicate the organ of speech mainly the mouth - *Vadha* means 'speak'. *Lapanam* also indicates the mouth according to the root. '*Lap*' means speaking. That is the root for such words as '*ālāpam*' '*sallāpam*' '*ālāpanā*' etc. Therefore it is not correct to say that the words which refer to the face also refer to the mouth. On the other hand words like '*vakthram*' and '*vadhānam*' which are the names for the mouth are also the name for the face. Since man is the only talking animal the mouth has a special place. That mouth is located in the face which is the greatest of all the organs. The eyes for seeing, the ears for hearing, the nose for smelling and the cheeks for the pleasure of touch are all in the face only. Even so, since what is special for the human species is speech and it is the mouth that speaks the same words have been kept for both the mouth and the face. It is the mouth which has two functions. Along with the eyes, ears etc it functions as a *jñānēndriya* and is able to taste the food. It is also doing the independent function of speech. Also it does the function of chewing the food. There is so much importance to the mouth. That is why same names are mentioned for both the face and the mouth.

Gaja-ānanar - *Vignēswarā* has the face of the elephant.

The head is the most important part of the body. Whether a person looks beautiful or ugly is said only with reference to the

face. Such a face of *Pillaiyār* - His peaceful eyes, fan-like ears, the trunk, nose etc - are of the elephant.

* * *

VAKRATHUNḌAR

We have seen that of the names for the face mentioned in Amaram '*Thuṇḍam*' is one. Although generally speaking '*thuṇḍam*' means the face, for the pig and the elephant which are noted for their nose, *thuṇḍam* would indicate only the nose. The speciality about the nose of the pig is that while the nose for other animals like cattle and horse goes on tapering towards the face for the pig it goes on increasing in size. For the elephant the nose itself hangs as the trunk. It is that trunk which is called '*thuṇḍam*'. For the birds the nose is long and ends pointedly and sharp. In Sanskrit that is also called '*thuṇḍam*'.

If the head is important in the body, the nose is important in the head. Its importance is not only because of its function but because of its form. We describe somebody's appearance with reference to the shape of his nose.

Vakram means what is curved. When someone behaves erratically we call him a 'vakram'. His quality is described as '*Vakra guṇam*'. One who is straightforward is like the straightline. In Sanskrit also the quality of straightforwardness is called '*ārjavam*' which means 'straight'. This word has its root the word 'ruju'.

When we say '*Vakra thuṇḍam*' 'Vakram' does not indicate anything bad. It only means the curved trunk. Since *Pillaiyār* has his trunk curved to the side, he is called '*Vakrathuṇḍar*'.

Although an elephant can bend the tip of its trunk without moving the trunk sideways *Pillaiyār* bends it only after taking the trunk sideways mostly to the left and occasionally to the right. That is why the name *Vakrathuṇḍar* - we recite the *sthōthrā*

'*Vakrathuṇḍa Mahākāya*'. (Muthuswāmi) Dīkshithar has sung '*Praṇava Swarūpa Vakrathuṇḍam*'. If the trunk is bent towards the right (valampuri), then it is *Praṇava Swarūpam*. We see the form of 'Om'. That is the speciality about the name *Vakrathuṇḍar*.

If we think of the acts of stealing done by Krishna we will be cured of the tendency to steal. If we think of his '*rāsa līlā*' our '*kāmam*' will be destroyed. In the same manner, if we think of *Vignēśwarā*'s '*vakra thuṇḍam*', our '*vakra*' qualities will go.

In *Gaṇapathi Gāyathrī* it is this name which has been mentioned : 'We meditate on *Vakrathuṇḍar*'. The purpose of that *manthrā* is to prod us on the right path.

* * *

SŪRPAKARṆAR

Sūrpakarṇar means one who has ears like a winnowing basket (*Sūrpa*).

When already the name *Gajakarṇakar* has been mentioned will it not be incorrect to give another similar name *Sūrpakarṇakar*? It would not be so.

We have seen that He has the name *Gajakarṇar* because He has wide ears through which He listens to all our prayers. But does he listen to our prayers only? He keeps listening to all that we talk most of which is just useless talk. Even among our prayers some will be foolish or useless. How can He lend his ears to all such talk or prayers? Therefore even when He is listening to everything He will take in whatever is to be retained by him and reject what is not necessary. This is the reason why He is called *Sūrpakarṇar*. (*Sūrpa* is a winnowing contrivance used for separating chaff etc from the grains). When grains are put in it and it is moved up and down unnecessary things like chaff are thrown away and only the grain is retained in the basket.

A separate name *Sūrpakarṇar* is given to him to make it clear that we should not think: 'Because He has, unlike other animals, widely spread ears and listens to all our prayers we can make any prayers and then he will respond to such prayers.' It is true that He listens to everything. But even when He is listening he weighs what is correct prayer and what is not and he will keep in his ears whatever is correct and good and reject the others. That is why this name.

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HĒRAMBAR

As far as I know no one has given a convincing meaning to this name on the basis of the root of this word. Or, probably I have not understood it correctly. There was a great scholar of *manthra śāstrā* by name *Bhāskara Rāyar*. His commentary on *Lalithā Sahasranāmam* is very famous. He has also written a commentary on *Ganēsa Sahasranāmām*. I looked into it to find out what comments he has made on the name *Hērambar*. According to it 'Hēramba' means one who founded the *Śaiva Āgama* and one who is with a lot of Souryam (valour). Although the commentator is a very great person it is not clear, probably due to my own short comings, how such meaning is derived from that word. Researchers say that the Tamil word 'Erumai' (Buffallo) has become *Hērambar*.

Although the greatness of Sanskrit is that it is possible in that language to give the meanings of words by splitting them into their roots there are some exceptions. When it can be said that such and such is the meaning because of such and such a root it is called 'Yowkikam'; what can be derived etymologically is Yowkikam. On the contrary, if it is said 'The reason is not known but this word has this particular meaning or refers to a particular person' such words are called 'Rūdy'. To me it appears that the word *Hēramba* is one such 'Rūdy'.

When the Pandavas ruled from Indraprastha before their 'vanavas' *Dharmāputhra* desired to perform *Rājasūya Yāgam* for which he sent his brothers in all four directions. During that time it was *Sahadēva* who went to the South and gained victory over the kingdoms there. In *Mahābhāratham* the name *Hērambam* is mentioned as one of the kingdoms over which *Sahadēva* gained victory. Could it be that in later days it was this kingdom which became Mysore? Mysore is the distortion of Mahishur - Mahisha - oor. Mahisham means buffalo. It is said that *Hēramba* is connected with buffalo. The rulers of that kingdom got defeated by *Sahadēva*. But it appears that they still thought high of themselves. Therefore it appears those who indulge in self-glorification are called *Hērambar*. The form in which *Vignēśwarā* was being worshipped in that kingdom might have got the name *Hēramba Gaṇapathi*.

This is merely a guess. It could be wrong. Finally what occurs to me is : *Vignēśwarā* might have thought 'Don't bother about the meaning. Does not the word *Hērambar* please the ears? Is it not sweet and commanding like me only? Is it not appropriate if I am called by this name? Then call me by that name. Why are you bothering yourself with a dictionary?' and therefore perhaps kept this name for Himself!

Whether He belonged to *Hēramba* kingdom or not *Hērambar* has become famous all over the country. In the sixteen forms (*Shōdaśa Gaṇapathi*) starting from *Bālagaṇapathi* there is *Hēramba Gaṇapathi* in *Shōdaśa Gaṇapathis*. In the *Shōdaśa nāmā* which we are discussing now also, there is *Hēramba Ganaplathi*.

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ELEPHANT WHICH IS WORSHIPPED BY LION

The form of *Hēramba* is something special. He has five faces and all of them are elephant faces. There is also a song 'Pancha

māthanga muka’. It appears that this was sung by (Muthuswāmī) Dikshithar on the *Vignēswarā Mūrthi* with five faces in *Tiruvārūr*.

Paramasivā has five faces. In *Śiva Panchākshari Dhyānam* it is like this. *Āchāryā* also has used this for pun.

Since *Īswarā* has five faces he is called *Panchāsyān*. The lion has also the name *Panchāsyam*. Here the meaning of ‘Pancha’ is what is ‘spread wide.’ When we say *Prapancham* it means what is wide and spread all over. In this context, we can also understand *panch* to mean five and derive the meaning that it is made up of the five elements. The elephant is always scared of the lion. We talk of ‘*Simha swapnam*’. It is said that if an elephant happens to see a lion even in its dream, it will die of fear! The lion will always be furious to kill the elephant which is larger than itself. The moment it sees an elephant it will gather all its strength and hit on its forehead. If it is said that such a lion performs *pūjā* to an elephant is it not a big wonder? It is that wonder about which *Āchāryā* says :

‘*Mahādanthi vakthrāpi panchāsyā mānyā*’

In the *Bhujanga Sthōthram* which *Āchāryā* sang on *Subrahmaṇya Swāmi* of *Tiruchendūr* the following appears in the first *ślōkā* which is *Vināyaka* sthuthi :

Sadhā bāla rūpāpi Vignādri hanthri
Mahādanthi vakthrāpi panchāsyā mānyā

Vignēswarā is always of the form of a child - *Sadhā bāla rūpa*. - *Api* means ‘even then’ : Although he is always a child he demolishes the obstacles which come like a mountain. *Vignadri* - obstacles which are like a mountain : *Hanthri* - he destroys.

It is after this it is said that although he is elephant he is being worshipped by the lion.

Mahadanthi vakthrapī panchāsyā manyā

Danthi means the elephant. In *Gaṇapathi Gāyathrī* it is the name Danthi that is mentioned for improving our intellect.

Āchāryā has sung with poetic genius in talking about things which can never happen and which are in *Pillaiyār*. First he says that the young child demolishes the mountain-like obstacles. In the same manner he says 'Even though he is elephant he is being worshipped by the Lion'. Those who hear this will think that 'Panchāsya' here means the lion. Really speaking *Panchāsya* here is not lion but *Śiva*. Did not *Śiva* perform *pūjā* to *Vignēśwarā* when he went for Thripura *Samhāram* and the axle of his chariot broke?

* * *

THE FIVE-FACED ONE WITH THE LION AS THE VEHICLE

He is not only '*Panchāsya mānyar*' He himself shines with the form having five faces as *Hērambar*. He has five elephant heads, ten hands and the lion as the vehicle. It is not only that the elephant is not afraid of the lion but it is sitting over it and controlling it. Just as by his five faces his reminding us of his father, by his vehicle namely lion, he reminds us of his mother. *Ambāl* is *Simhavāhini*. The *Mūrthi Mahāgaṇapathi* also has ten hands but he does not have five faces or the lion as the vehicle. It is only *Hērambar* who has such a form. In the *Nīlāyadākshī* temple in *Nāgapattiṇam* he is of this form in copper. The four faces are facing four directions and the fifth one is on top of the four just as a '*krītam*'. It will be joy to look at the five faces all of elephant heads.

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SKANDHA PŪRVAJAR

We have come to the last name. It means that he is the elder brother of *Subrahmaṇya Swāmi*. *Pūrvajar* means one who is born earlier. He is also referred to as *Agrajar*.

When we refer to a brother as 'Sahodhara' in Sanskrit it will not be possible to find out whether he is elder or younger. It is the word *Pūrvajar* that indicates that one is an elder brother. Similarly the younger brother is called 'anujar'. *Rāmānujar* means *Lakshmanā* who is the younger brother of Rama. In Amaram there is a name *Gajamukānujar* for *Subrahmaṇyār*.

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THE GREATNESS OF BEING MURUGAN'S ELDER BROTHER

Among the '*Shōḍaśa nāmās*' which we were discussing there is no name to indicate that he is the son of *Śiva* or of *Ambāl*. There is also no name to indicate whose 'pathi' he is. Just as there are different forms as a *brahmachāri* there are also different forms along with consort. With Vallabhai He is Vallabha *Gaṇapathi*. Siddhi and Buddhi are also his consorts. He has also sons through them but there is no name to indicate that he is their father. But when giving the series of names, at the auspicious ending the name to indicate that He is the elder brother of Skanda is there. Why is it so?

Generally, we refer to a person who is the elder and then say that the other is the younger. But here very differently, the younger brother's name is mentioned and it is said *Vignēśwarā* is his elder brother. Why is it so?

It is because *Vignēśwarā* is closely connected with *Subrahmaṇya Swāmi*'s story. The elder brother has a very important part in the three stages of his life, namely, birth, marriage and *sanyāsam*.

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THE ROLE OF THE ELDER IN THE BIRTH OF MURUGA

The manifestation of Murugan which is *Kumāra Sambhavam* has something special about it. In *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇam* when

Viswāmīthra narrates the story to Rama and *Lakshmanā* he uses the words *Kumāra Sambhavam* at the end. *Mahākavi Kālidās* has taken these words from the *Ādhi Kavi* and gave it as the caption for his great epic.

What is so special about that birth? All other people would attain a status after birth, growth, learning etc. But the great post namely the post of Commander-in-chief of the army of the *Dēvās* was waiting for *Kumāra Sambhavam*, that is *Kumārā* to be born. He is one who became the Commander-in-chief of the *Dēvās* even as he was born. This manifestation occurred at a time when the *Dēvās* were undergoing unbearable harassment at the hands of the *asurās* and they were waiting for this manifestation to get relief.

Śūrapadmāsuraṇ, *Tārakāsuran* and others had obtained boon from *Śiva* Himself that they could be killed only by someone who is equal to *Śiva*. Who is there equal to *Śiva*? Only *Śiva* is equal to Himself. But the one who gave the boon cannot kill them. It is for this reason they obtained such a boon very cleverly and without fear of any enemies kept harassing the *Dēvās*.

The *Dēvās* thought about the situation and found a solution. The *Śrūthi* says that a person's son is equal to himself - '*āthmā vai puthra nāmāsi*'. According to *sāsthrās* both are equal because the son is born out of the virility of the father. Therefore *Dēvās* concluded that if *Paramēswarā* could cause a son to be born who would be their leader and the commander of their army they would get relief and performed penance for the same. It was also the time when the Lord was doing penance as *Dakṣiṇāmūrthi*. *Ambāl* who came to do service to him also was doing penance. It is in this auspicious background of penance by both of them that *Kumārā* was born. That is the greatness of the birth.

Since he was born as a child he indulged in sports (*līlā*) appropriate to a child only for six days. So far as he is concerned six is his number for everything. He has six faces. There are six

alphabets in his *manthrā*. The 'thithi' during which he was born is 'Shashti' which is the sixth thithi. Those who suckled him were the six Kruthika *Dēvis*. Although he had the name of a child (*Kumārā*) his *lilā* appropriate to that stage was only for six days. During those six days only he played extraordinary *lilā*. Afterwards immediately he assumed the responsibility of the Commander-in-chief of the *Dēvās*, destroyed the *asurās* and protected the *Dēvās* and all the world.

It may be asked what is *Vignēswarā*'s role in this. If it is said that it is *Śiva*'s son who is equal to *Śiva* Himself is not *Vignēswarā* *Śiva*'s son? When that is so, if it is said that *Dēvās* performed penance for the birth of *Kumāraswāmi* does it mean that *Vignēswarā* had not manifested at that time? It is to underline this fact that he has been given the name '*Skandhapūrvajar*'.

'All right. If *Vignēswarā* was already there why should the *Dēvās* have performed penance for the manifestation of another son of *Śiva*? Does it mean that although he is *Śiva*'s son he is not equal to *Śiva*? It is not so. He is equal to the father. During *Thripurasamhāram* he has shown that only after performing *pūjā* to him his father could succeed in his task of slaying the *Thripurāsuras*. When that is so why did the *Dēvās* think that another son of *Śiva* should be born?

The reason for this is one of the conditions in the boon that *Sūrapadhman* had obtained. *Asurās* usually make such conditions when obtaining boons so that they cannot be killed. He too had done the same thing. *Sūrapadhman* had laid the condition that the one who is equal to *Śiva* who could kill him should have manifested without male-female union. He had deliberately obtained such a boon in order that *Pillaiyār* who is all powerful would not be able to kill him.

Vignēswarā has manifested himself in different forms and in different ways. In one of those manifestations we have seen that he

was created by *Ambāl* out of the turmeric powder collected from her own body. In *Purāṇās* there are also certain other stories about this *avathāram*. Both *Ambāl* and *Swāmi* had looked at the *Praṇava* aksharam which had been artistically written in the art hall in *Kailāsam*. At that time their sight fell on the *Praṇavāksharam* simultaneously. Immediately the form of *Vignēswarā* manifested. This is one story. On one occasion *Ambāl* had taken the form of a female elephant. At that time the Lord had also taken the form of a male elephant. The child born of the two elephants is *Gaṇapathi*. This is another story. Jnanasambandhar has referred to this story in his *Thēvāram*.

When *Lalithāmbāl* attacked *Bandāsuran*, he fired the Vigna Yanthram and tried to immobilize her army. At that time She looked at the face of *Paramasivā* who had taken the form with the bow, arrow, goad etc like her only. Immediately, *Gaṇapathi* manifested. This is yet another story.

In all such stories *Ambāl* is connected with the manifestation of *Vignēswarā*. Therefore according to the condition laid down by *Sūrapadhman* when obtaining his boon, killing him was becoming an impossible task. That is why the *Dēvās* prayed for the birth of another son of *Śiva* and *Kumāraswāmi* manifested from the sparks that came out of his eyes without being connected with *Ambāl*.

To put it in another way it was because *Vignēswarā* provided the space, *Kumāra* Sambhavam was possible. Although *Vignēswarā* was all powerful he did not go to kill the *asurās* in order to honour the condition laid down in the boon that his father had given to the *asurās*. It was because he did not go to kill the *asurās*, *Kumāraswāmi* could manifest and become the chief of the army of *Dēvās*.

He had the power to manifest in different forms. If he had wanted he could have himself entered into his father and could

have manifested in a different form from him without being connected with *Ambāl*. He could himself have become the Commander-in-chief of the army of *Devās*, destroyed the *asurās* and attained the great glory. It is because he did not do it, the world got the glorious *Mūrthi*, *Subrahmaṇyam*.

Although *Pillaiyār* had no direct connection with *Kumāra Sambhavam* since he did not undertake the destruction of the *asurās* he had a negative connection but a strong negative connection in this.

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THE ROLE OF THE ELDER IN MURUGAN'S MARRIAGE

Next comes the marriage of the younger *Swāmi* with *Valli*. It is the marriage which has provided the scope for story, *upanyāsam*, drama, cinema, dance-drama etc.

Most people would be familiar with the story. It is that it was because *Vignēśwarā* came as an elephant and chased *Valli*, she could join *Subrahmaṇya*. When *Valli* did not join him *Subrahmaṇya* did not know what to do. It is only then that he realized that only if he prayed to his elder brother the obstacle would be removed. Immediately, he meditated on *Vignēśwarā*. He responded at once, came as a wild elephant, chased *Valli* and made her to join his brother. In *Thiruppugazh* when referring to this incident of *Valli* joining Murugan, He has been referred to as 'little Murugan'. As a matter of fact, it was much before that when he was really young he had destroyed the *asurā* and later he gained such a glory that even Krishna talks of him in *Gītā* : '*Senānīnām aham skandah*' (among the generals I am Murugan). Such a Murugan was unable to get an ordinary tribal girl and remained powerless. It is with reference to the state of helplessness that Arunagirinathar has referred to him in the above mentioned *Thiruppugazh* as 'little Murugan' and not with reference to his age.

Therefore in the marriage of *Subrahmaṇya*, *Vignēśwarā* has a direct role. We can say he played a key role.

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THE ROLE OF THE ELDER IN MURUGAN'S SANYĀSAM

In the story of Skanda, there is also the anecdote of his having taken *sanyāsam*. But curiously he had taken *sanyāsam* before his marriage! *Dandāyuthapāṇi* is the form when he had become *sanyāsi*. There would hardly be anyone who does not know Palani (a sacred abode of *Subrahmaṇya*). Really speaking what he is holding is not a weapon to punish with (*Dandāyutham*). It is merely a stick, '*daṇḍam*' just as what we are holding. It is merely bamboo. *Dandāyutham* is the weapon with one who is the chief of the army. The chief of army of *Lalithāmbāl* is called 'Dhandini'. *Dandāyuthapāṇi* stood on the Palani hills with the *daṇḍam* of *sāṇthi* as a sign of his having controlled his mind before using the *daṇḍam* in a war. For us controlling the mind itself is like a great war and therefore we may consider that the *daṇḍam* which he is holding is a weapon. But, for him it is merely decorative. He is keeping it only as a reminder for us.

It is the form which is that of renunciation (*sanyāsam*) which no other deity has! Is there any other deity who has shaved off his head at such a young age and stands with a mere loin cloth and *daṇḍam*? He is unmatched in beauty, in power and status. He had taken *avathāram* as the chief of the *Dēvās*. If within six days of his birth he had taken to the form of renunciate and stood as the personification of '*sāṇthi*' who is responsible for it? It is *Vignēśwarā*. It was because *Vignēśwarā* went round the father and mother and won the prize and *Subrahmaṇya* lost in the competition he became a renunciate. The credit for making him the *Mūrthi* of great *jñāna* and '*sāṇthi*' for all the world goes to *Pillaiyār* only.

Then the father and the mother pacified him. After all, was it not merely a drama? Immediately the one who was with a mere loin cloth started off as commander-in-chief. Still since he thought that the form in which he was a renunciate should keep vibrating for the destruction of the indriyas and for *jñāna* and peace, he had charged that form with his power before he went as commander-in-chief.

Vignēśwarā is closely connected with the birth of *Subrahmaṇya* as the Commander-in-chief of the *Dēvās*, his marriage with *Vallī* and his having taken the form of a renunciate in Palani. That is why in order to show that he is the elder brother of such a younger brother the special name '*Skandapūrvajar*' is included in the '*Shōdaśa nāmās*'.

'*Pūrvajar*' means the one who is born earlier - '*ādhi*' (the very beginning). But this name comes last as the sixteenth (antham). It appears that this name shows what is whole (*sampūrṇam*), joining the '*ādhi*' and '*antham*'.

MURUGAN WHO HAS ALL THE BENEFITS OF THE PHALAŚRUTHI

Something interesting occurs to me. The *ślōkā* '*Vidhyārambē..... jāyathē*' is the *Phalaśruthi* which states the fruits that are gained by one who recites the sixteen names of *Vignēśwarā*. It appears there is proof for each one of these in the story of Skandha.

Vidhyārambē : For *Subrahmaṇya* who manifested from the '*jñana nēthra*' of *Paramēśwarā* there was no need to begin learning in the sense of starting from '*akṣharābhyāsam*'. He himself is the very meaning of *Praṇavam* and he had given the *Upadeśa* of the same to his father. Therefore as far he is concerned *Vidhyārambam* actually means taking *sanyāsa* and experiencing

Brahma vidhyā. *Vignēśwarā* was the reason for his taking to sanyas since *Vignēśwarā* had won the competition of going round the world and securing the prize of the fruit. *

(**Periyavā* was reminded that *Vignēśwarā* has a name 'Kumaraguru' and therefore it appears that on some occasion he had done *Vidhyārambam* for Murugan. Immediately he asked 'Kumaraguru' comes in the *Dhūrvāyugma archanā*, is it not?' Yes, this name appears among the twenty one names with which *archanā* is done twenty one times with twin *dhurvā* grass. *Dhurvā* is grass, *yugmam* is a pair.)

Periyavā continued 'Did not *Paramasivā* know the meaning of *Pratīvam*? But it is only for showing to the world humility and guru bakhti he received *Upadēsam* from his son. In the same manner *Subrahmaṇya* also would have thought that he too should become a disciple to someone else, receive *Upadēśa* from him and show humility to the world. Since father has already become his own disciple he will not give *Upadēsam*. The mother also will not give *Upadēsam* since she is half of the father' - Therefore he had *Upadēsam* from the elder brother and made him *Kumaraguru*. I had explained in a round about way how *Pillaiyār* was responsible for *Subrahmaṇya* taking *sanyāsam*. But according to this *Subrahmaṇya* directly takes him as guru during *Vidhyārambam* and raises his status' said *Periyavā*).

Vivāhē : This relates to the marriage with *Valli*. We have seen the elder brother's important role in this.

He has played a key role both in the younger brother's marriage and *sanyāsam*. He made him *sanyāsi* even when he was a child and when he grew up he made him *gruhastha*! But he made his great devotee *Avvayār* old and like a *sanyāsinī* when she was young and at a time when she should have married. The *Swāmi* whom we worship by and large as a *brahmachāri* has played such funny sports.

Pravēṣē : The reason for an auspicious *Mūrthi* like *Subrahmaṇya* to enter the world was because *Vignēśwarā* was disqualified to destroy *Sūrapadhman*. That is, in a negative way he was responsible for *Subrahmaṇya*'s '*pravēṣam*'.

Nirgamē: *Nirgamam* means leaving something and going away. As soon as the marriage with *Valli* was over he left this world which he had entered and moved to his permanent abode namely *Skanda lōkam*. He moved away with both his consorts. Even before the marriage with *Valli* he had married *Dēvāsēnā*.

There were two reasons for him to take *avathāram* in this world. One was to destroy *Sūrapadhman*. The other is that he wanted to marry the two daughters of his uncle *Mahā Vishṇu*, one of whom was growing up as *Dēvaraja*'s daughter and the other was growing up as the daughter of a tribal king.

At first he went beyond *Tiruchendūr* into the ocean and completed the destruction of the *asurā*. Then he married *Dēvāsēnā* at *Tirupparankunram*. Even when he was with her there *Nārādā* came to him and told him that *Valli* was in deep love with him in *Chittoor*. It is for this reason that in the *Tirupparankunram* temple he is not with *Valli* and *Dēvāsēnā* but he has *Dēvāsēnā* on one side and *Nārādā* on the other side. Just as the sadguru turns *Paramāthmā*'s compassion to *Jīvāthmā*, *Nārādā* turned *Subrahmaṇya* towards *Valli*. Therefore *Swāmi* has given place by his side to *Nārādā*.

After marrying *Valli* he remained with both his consorts at *Tiruthani*. Then he moved away to *Skandalōkam*. That is *Nirgamam*. It was the marriage with *Valli* that paved the way. With that the second purpose of his *avathāram* was also achieved.

Since it was *Pillaiyār* who helped him to get married with *Valli* he has helped him in his *Nirgamam* to *Skandalōkam*.

Sangramē: *Subrahmaṇyār* shows extraordinary qualities of courage as the commander-in-chief of the army of *Dēvās*. Before commencing the fight he would have definitely performed *pūjā* to *Vignēśwarā*. The reason why I say this is that the father who went for *Thripurasamhāram* without doing *pūjā* to *Vignēśwarā* and the mother who went for *Bhandasurā Samhāram* without doing similar *pūjā* met with obstacles and it was only after doing *pūjā* to *Vignēśwarā* they succeeded in their undertaking. Therefore younger brother would have been very careful in the beginning only and done *pūjā*.

Sarvakāryēshu: When he competed with the elder brother for gaining the gift of the fruit he did not succeed. When he became *sanyāsi* without praying to him he could not remain a *sanyāsi*. Therefore although he would have prayed before going to war he forgot him when he went to *Valli*. It is only to show how bad is passion it happened like this. Many obstacles came up. It was only after praying to him he succeeded. Therefore after that he would definitely have done *pūjā* to *Vignēśwarā* before whatever he did.

Therefore when concluding the *Shōḍaśanāmās* of *Pillaiyār* mention has been made of Skanda who had obtained all the benefits of the *Phalaśruthi* and the names are concluded with *Skandapūrvaja*.

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THE GREATNESS OF THE NAME OF SKANDA

Skandar means 'One who appears with great force'. *Skandamūrthi* manifested as the *jyōthis* of *Paramēśwarā* (*sakthi nēthram*) with great energy to bless the world. That is why although he has several names such as *Subrahmaṇyār*, *Kārthikēyar*, *Kumārar*, *Śaravaṇabhavar* etc the *Purāṇā* relating to him is called *Skandapurāṇam* or Skandam. The world which is his abode is called *Skandalōkam*. The 'vratham' which is observed in

connection with him is Skanda Shashti. *Paramēswarā* who is with *Ambāl* and Murugan has the name *Sōmaskandar*.

If something finds a place in *Śruthi* (*Vēdhās*) it has special greatness and respect. The name Skanda has such greatness. If in Skandam which is *Purānā* it is said that *Nāradar* was the Guru of *Valli*, in *Chandōgya* Upanishad it is said that *Sanathkumārār* who was *Subrahmaṇyā*'s previous *avathāram* gave *jnānōpadēsam* to *Nāradar*. Brahma has the name Sanath. *Sanathkumāra* appeared at the beginning of creation by Brahma's mere wish. He is important of the four namely Sanaka, Sanandanar, *Sanāthanar* and *Sanathkumārā*. These four who were 'Brahma *jnānis*' even when they were born are the role models for the Nivruthi *mārgā*. They are eternal youth who do not know anything of '*kāmam*'. In *Chandōgyam* it is said that *Sanathkumāra* only came as *Subrahmaṇya*. In *Chandōgyam* where it is said that it was *Sanathkumārā* who was *Subrahmaṇyā* the name Skanda has been mentioned twice.

Skandan is a name which has spread all over the world. Just as some people pronounce the word 'school' as 'ischool' the name Skandar has become 'Iskandar' in foreign lands. 'Al' in Semitic languages is a definite article (like 'the' in English) indicating a particular thing. 'Al' is also added before a word as a mark of respect. That is how Iskandar became Al Iskandar and spread to Greece and became Alexander.

The name Sikandar also is a distortion of Skandar. Therefore it is appropriate that recently a Skandagiri temple has come up in Secunderabad which is Sikkandarabad.

Scandinavia is the group of countries, Sweden, Norway and Denmark. That name has come up from the region Skandia - just as Hindu - India it is Skanda-Skandia.

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LET US START THE DAY BY REMEMBERING THE ELDER BROTHER

When we say *Pillaiyār*, we will immediately remember that He is the son of *Śiva-Śakthi*. When we conclude *Shōḍasanāma* with *Skandapūrvajar* we will remember the other son also and the entire family of *Śiva* will be remembered. That is why it is the last name at the auspicious end.

All of us are children of *Pārvathi-Paramēśwarā*. *Vignēśwarā* is *Pūrvajar* for all of us. When the name of his younger brother *Skandamūrthi* is mentioned all of us are included in this. Therefore as soon as we get up in the morning and before starting the day's work let us recite the *Shōḍasanāma* of *Vignēśwarā* with the feeling that he is our elder brother and let us succeed in all our day's work without any obstacles and attain *sreyas - sarva kāryēshu vignasthasya na jāyathē*.

May all of us repeat the sixteen names of the *Shōḍasanāmā ślōkā* starting with 'Sumukar and ending with *na jāyathē*' and be the recipient of sixteen great blessings.

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GURU





DĒŚIKAR WHO GIVES UPADĒŚAM

THE WAY AND DIRECTION IN LIFE

A way is linked to a direction. If there is a way it will take us in some direction and reach us to a place. When we talk of place or space immediately there will be direction also. There cannot be a place unrelated to a direction such as the north, south etc. A way is there only for going from one place to the other. Therefore it is also connected with direction.

In conducting our life also we talk of the way. We say that life should be led in the right way. When problems come up in life we think 'What is the way out?' Thus we treat life also as a journey and we talk of a way in it. In English also they speak of a 'way of life'. Just as we move from one point to another in space when we move from one point to another in time that is life. We also see that in life thoughts keep moving from one to the other. Since there is movement in life also it is said to be a journey and we talk of a way in it.

It is only after knowing the direction we should follow a way. Otherwise we may not reach the place we intend to reach.

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PŪRVŌTHTHARAM: EAST - NORTH

Usually we enquire of someone about his '*Pūrvōththaram*'. This is enquiring how he was earlier and how he became later or how he will be. *Pūrvam* means before; *Utharam* means later. In a book also we refer to the earlier part as *Pūrvabhāg* and the later part as *Utharabhāg*. In Sanskrit such words are clearly connected with direction. *Pūrvam* means East, *Utharam* means the North. But

when we say that *Pūrvam* (East) is the first, should not Paschim (the West) be the later one? How can the North be the opposite side of East? Since moving in circumambulation (*Pradakshinām*) is a more respectful way than moving across, it appears that in the life cycle also we have to start it from the East. If we go from the East across to the other side it is West. But if we go in circumambulation starting from the East it will be the South then West and then it will be the North and finally we will come back to the East. Therefore if the life cycle commences in the East the North comes only after passing more than three quarters of the circle.

If, instead of *Pūrvōththaram* if it had been kept as *Pūrva - Paschim* it would have been inauspicious. When East is the front and the West is the rear it only reminds us of the rear parts of our body. But *uththaram* (North) is vertically above the East. Moreover, it will again take us to the East by which the beginning and end will come together which is auspicious. Therefore, it appears they have kept *Pūrvōththaram*. Since the East and the North are the suitable directions for doing japam and *pūjā*, *Pūrvōththaram* is appropriate.

Since *Pūrvōththaram* was applied to the life cycle later, the same term has come to be used in all other contexts like book etc to indicate which is the first or the front and which is the later part.

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THE WORD 'DHICH' BOTH AS NOUN AND VERB

From the Sanskrit word 'dhich' the word '*dhisā*' is derived. Dhich is used both as a noun and as a verb. It is only when it is used as a noun it relates to space and gives the meaning 'direction'. When it is used as a verb it means 'do like this' - like someone advising somebody to do a thing in a particular way or giving an order.

When someone is told 'Do like this' we say that he is being directed. Even in the case of medicine there is 'direction' about how much to be taken, when and how. The very word direction itself means '*dhiṣā*'. We talk of the northern direction, southern direction etc. The similarity of such words is enough to show that people all over the world have the same kind of thinking. They too use the word 'direction' with the same two meanings as we use the word *dhich*. As basic to this we find that there is the same thought all over of treating life as a journey.

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DĒSAM, UPADĒSAM

The word *dēsam* is derived from '*dhich*' meaning 'place'. After all, is not a *dēsam* an area which has been circumscribed by four directions? The word *pradēsam* also is derived like this.

From the word '*dhich*' meaning 'giving a direction' about what should be done such words *Ādēsam*, *Sandēsam*, *Upadēsam* etc have come. *Dēsam* is a part which has been circumscribed by a boundary in terms of directions which are for all people. Therefore, in accordance with the attitude of considering possession as the most important, this word has come to be considered appropriate only to area. Words like *Ādēsam*, *Sandēsam*, *Upadēsam* have been derived by adding '*Ā*', '*sa*', '*upa*' to *dēsam*.

Ādēsam means a command based on authority. We call as *Ādēsam* even what occurs in the mind or what comes out as a divine command.

Sandēsam means a message, information. All messages which are not in the nature of an order are *Sandēsam*.

There are also words like '*Uddhēsam*' '*Ēkadēsam*' derived from *Dēsam* which are not related to teaching someone how to do a thing.

Uddhēsam is what is thought in the mind without coming out as an order or even as an ordinary message. When we do not definitely know a thing and tell about it in an approximate manner, we say, 'I do not know how much it is; what I said is my *Uddhēsam*.' *Bhagawān* also when referring in the '*Vibhūthi Yogam*' to all those things which are the best and in which he is, He says in the end 'all that I have said till now do not cover my infinite qualities. Whatever I said is only indicative'. When He says this He uses the words '*Uddhesathah prōkthah*'. *Āchāryā* (in his *bāshyam*) has taken *Uddhēsam* to mean '*Ēkadēsam*'. From this we see that the word '*Ēkadēsam*' also means 'mentioning something in a particular way'. What is a part of something which is whole is called '*Ēkadēsam*'. I have said all this to explain the word '*Upadēsam*'.

When we talk of '*Upadēsam*' we are reminded of *Guru-Śishyā*. There is no *Upadēsam* without a guru to give it and a *śishyā* to receive it.

What anyone tells anything to anyone else is called '*Sandēsam*'. Whatever is told by someone having the status of a king to one below him who has to listen to it whether it is good or bad for him is '*Ādēsam*'. What the guru tells the *śishyā* only for his good is *Upadēsam*.

In the matter of status the difference between guru and *śishyā* is more than that between a king and his subjects. Guru is treated as *Īswarā* and given that status. A *śishyā* has to be obedient to a guru in a much bigger way than a subject has to remain controlled by the king.

Yet, what guru tells the *śishyā* without the severity of '*Ādēsam*' is called *Upadēsam*, indicating sweetness and love.

THE MEANING OF 'UPA'

The prefix 'upa' gives several meanings. Normally, 'upa' is added to indicate a lower status - Janadhipathi and Upa-Janadhipathi, Angam, Upangam etc. When something has greater importance than another 'upa' is added. 'Parārdham' is a very big number. It is obtained by adding seventeen zeros after the number one. To indicate that *Bhagawān's* auspicious qualities are more than that, it is said '*Upa Parārdhēr - Harēr gunāh*'.

Another meaning to 'upa' is 'near'. When we call the *Brahmōpadesam* as Upanayanam it means 'taking near', taking the boy near the guru. Because after that ceremony the boy is to be left with the guru for *gurukulāvāsam* and adhyayna, the name upanayanam has come. In 'upa'nayanam the guru invests the boy with the *upavīdham* (sacred thread) and takes responsibility for him and gives him the '*manthrā Upadesam*'. The highest *Upadesam* that a guru can give is 'upa'nishad. Thus whatever is great is connected with 'upa'.

In the word 'upanishad' 'upa' means 'to take refuge in *Brahma vidhyā*'; at the beginning of his *bāshyam* for *Katopanishad* *Āchāryā* uses the word 'approach' 'going near'. He has said that the 'ni' that follows 'upa' in Upanishad means 'developing firm faith in *vidhyā* and that the 'sath' at the end means the destruction of ignorance by such faith. (the 'shad' at the end of Upanishad is actually a variation of 'sath' according to the rules of grammar). He also says that 'sath' not only means 'to destroy' but 'reaching a thing' and that with that meaning Upanishad means 'taking refuge in *vidhyā*, developing faith in it and attaining the Brahman'.

Therefore 'upa' indicates going near something. When we say 'near the guru' it indicates a closeness, love and affection. Of the different types of *mōkshas*, being near the *Bhagawān* has been described as '*Sāmīpya Mōksham*'.

When we say *Upadēsam* it indicates that the guru just does not leave it to the *sis̥hyā* to do what he tells him but he remains near him and helps him to do it.

Upadēsa is what the guru takes to the *sis̥hyā*'s heart by being near.

What is that one thing he tells the *sis̥hyā* to do? It is the way to live. It is the way of living - 'follow this direction in your life'. The *Upadēsa* that a noble guru gives will not confine itself to the impermanent journey of life. Through this only he will take him to the experience of 'Brahmam' which is permanent.

In the word '*upakāram*' '*upa*' shows love and interest and the quality of doing good to another even if he himself has to undergo difficulty. The word '*upachāram*' indicates bhakthi and respect. When the guru gives *Upadēsam* to the *sis̥hyā* with love and care he does not mind his own difficulty and thus he does *upakāram*. At the same time he shows respect and bhakthi to the *vidhyā* that he gives to the *sis̥hyā* and through this he does *upachāram* to *Vidhyāthi Dēvathā*.

What I talk to you now you all call '*upanyāsam*'. What do the words '*upa*' and '*nyāsam*' mean here? '*Nyāsam*' has several meanings. One meaning is 'to keep', 'to impress'. Another meaning is 'give up'. '*San-yāsam*' means 'giving up fully'. It means renouncing everything. Giving is also another meaning. We use the word '*upanyāsam*' in the sense of giving themes or subjects in a good way,. In the North what is spoken is not referred to as '*upanyāsam*'. They refer to what is written as '*upanyāsam*'. Whatever it is, '*upanyāsam*' is not something lower than '*nyāsam*'. Actually doing '*nyāsam*' in a much better way is *upanyāsam*.

We can also say that '*Upadēsam*' also gives the direction 'do like this' and shows the way. One who gives such *Upadēsam* is

called 'Upadēsar'. Just as one who does *upanyāsam* is a 'upanyāsakā', one who gives 'Upadēsam' is 'Upadēsar'.

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THE WORD 'DĒSIKAR' WITH TWO MEANINGS

It is that *Upadēsar* who is called 'Dēśikar'. The person whom we call guru or *āchāryā* also is referred to as 'Dēśikar'.

The word 'Dēśikar' is also related to a *dēsam* (country). In that context *Dēśikar* means one who has a country as his own, a native of that country. *Dēśikar* is also one who knows all the places in a country and can guide others.

But in particular we refer to the guru who is *Upadēsar* and who is the guide for our spiritual journey as *Dēśikar*. Since he teaches and commands he is *Dēśikar* on the basis of 'dhich' used as a verb. Since he guides others to go on a particular path he is also *Dēśikar*, derived from 'dhich' used as a noun.

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WORD THAT SHOWS CORDIAL RELATIONSHIP

Of the three words, guru, *āchāryā* and *dēśikar*, guru means a great person and also one who removes the darkness (of ignorance). *āchāryā* means one who follows the *āchārās* which have come in a particular tradition and makes the *śishyā* also follow the same. In both there is nothing to show the important task that he does namely *Upadēsam*. It is only the word 'Dēśikar' which indicates it. All the words like great person, one who removes the darkness of ignorance and one who follows high *āchārās* etc separate them from the *śishyās*. Just as a guide comes along and shows which is what in a place it is only *Dēśikar* who is with us as a guide and saves us from the dangers of this world and makes it possible for us to understand the beauties of the spiritual world and from this we can understand his bond of love.

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HIGHER THAN THE MOTHER AND THE FATHER IS THE GURU

No one else can render the help that the teacher (*āchāryā*) does. 'If we take refuge unto the mother she will not be able to make us transcend '*māyā*'. Although she has lot of love for us and she makes a lot of sacrifices for our sake, she cannot make us transcend *māyā* because she herself remains entangled in *māyā*. Similarly the father also will not be able to do it. Brothers or sisters or friends and relatives cannot do it. Therefore I take refuge unto the holy feet of guru.' - this is how *Āchāryā* says in the most touching manner.

Śaraṇam na bhavathi jananī na pithā na sōdarāschā(a)nyē
Śaraṇam Dēśika charaṇam

'*Śaraṇam*' means refuge; '*Charaṇam*' means the feet. It is to be noted that *Āchāryā* has used the word '*Dēśika*' for guru. When *Thōtakāchāryā* made the *Sthōthram* on him he used the same word '*Dēśika*' and says '*Bhava Śankara Dēśika mē Śaraṇam*'.

Mother and father give birth to us, make us live well in the world and give us all that is necessary for this world. But all these are impermanent. It is only the guru who gives the wealth which is permanent, namely the experience of Brahman (*Brahmānubhavam*). In *Vivēka Chūdāmaṇī* *Āchāryā* says in a touching manner that at the end of the *Upadēsam* the guru says 'I have treated you as my own son and I have given *Upadēsam* repeatedly' - *Swasudavath asakruth - thwām bhāvayithvā*. There is another version of this. It is '*thathathulam asakruth thwam bhāvayetham*'. It means the guru tells the *sishyā* 'You repeatedly practice this matchless *Upadēsa*'. But somehow it appears to me that the guru feeling that he is the mother and father of the *sishyā* and tirelessly giving *Upadēsam* to him so as to make deep impression on him is a better version. 'Asakruth' means repeatedly.

ĀCHĀRYA DHARMAM

At the end of his *Gītā Bāshyam* (Chapter XVIII - 72) *Āchāryā* has made known his view that it is the *āchāryā*'s dharmam to give repeated *Upadēsam* to the *sishyā* till he understands it. After finishing the *Gitōpadēsam*, *Bhagawān* asked Arjuna 'Have you listened to all that I said with one pointed mind?' When *Āchāryā* comments on this he says : *Bhagawān* asked like this to find out whether the *sishyā* had absorbed what He had said. In case he had not understood or absorbed He would find some other way to make him understand what He had said'. He also says 'it is the *āchāryā* dharmam to try by several means to make the *sishyā* understand the purpose of *Upadēsam*', *Ānandagiri* who has written explanatory notes - *Tīkai* - has followed *Āchāryā*'s mind and says that even if the *sishyā* is not able to understand because of his poor mental capability, the *āchāryā* should not ignore him but should explain the *Upadēsam* again and again.

Just as when a child does not feel like eating, the mother makes it eat by playing with it and showing it something or the other the guru somehow makes the *sishyā* understand his *Upadēsam* even when he cannot absorb it. The food that the mother gives is useful for only one time. Again we feel hungry and feel weak. But the *Upadēsa* given by guru is like amrutham and gives spiritual strength which is permanent.

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THE GREATNESS OF THE MOTHER AND THE FATHER

From what is said above it should not be understood that the mother and father are useless and could be discarded. It is only after mentioning them as '*Dēvō bhava*' the *Vēdhā* says '*āchāryā Devō bhava*'. There is also another aspect - the mother and father are also guru in a way and it is only at the time of upanayanam the boy is entrusted to a guru.

There is a word called 'āchāryavān'. It means a good *sishyā* who is having a good *āchāryā*. In *Chāndōgyam* it is said 'Āchāryavān *Purushō Vēdhā*'. It means that only the person who has a good *āchāryā* attains *jnāna*. In *Bruhadāranyam* there is a *manthrā* in which this word appears with the word 'māthrumān' and 'pithrumān' before it. Janakar goes on telling *Yājñavalkya* Maharishi the *Upadēsas* given to him by several gurus. *Yājñavalkya*, when approving the *Upadēsa* of each one of the gurus says that he has given *Upadēsa* in the manner in which a *māthrumān*, a *pithrumān* and *āchāryavān* should give *Upadēsam*. When commenting on this *Āchāryā* says that one who is being trained in the right way by the mother is 'māthrumān', then as he grows up and is guided on the right way by the father he is 'pithrumān' and when he is guided on the right path by the *āchāryā* from the time of *upanayanam* and till the end of his *gurukulavāsam* he is 'āchāryavān'. It is the one who thus gets purified by three different people and made '*suddhi thraya hēthu samyukthan*' becomes a qualified *āchāryā* himself; he has said that such a person only will give *Upadēsam* without *dēviating* from the tenets of the *sāsthrās*. Thus when the boy is very young and of a tender age before he is sent to *gurukulavāsam* at the age of eight it is the mother and father who have the responsibility of an *āchāryā* and guide him on the right path. This is what has been indicated in a small way in *Bruhadāranyam* and *Āchāryā* has brought it out in a way that it is explicit.

In *Katōpanishad* the same matter appears where there is a hint which is even gentler than this. *Yamadharma*rāja gives *Upadēsam* of *Agni Vidhyā* to *Nachikēthas*. After giving *Upadēsa* he tells him 'One who, after performing this *kriyā* thrice and getting connected with three does three things, transcends the cycle of birth and death'.

Ordinarily a Brahmin is called '*shadkarmā nirāthan*' which means that he is engaged in six activities. He does *Vēdhā*

adhyayanam himself and teaches *Vēdhā* to the others, performs *Yāgam* himself and conducts *yāgam* for others, receives *dhānam* from a person of virtue and also gives *dhānam* to a person of virtue. These are the six activities. When these are taken as pairs, they become three activities. This is what has been referred to here.

In the original it is said '*Thripirēdya*' meaning 'connected with three'. Which are the three to which the agni ritual is to be related and done thrice so that birth and death is transcended? It has merely been mentioned as 'three'. Commenting on this *Āchāryā* says 'being connected to the mother, father and *āchāryā* - that is given good *Upadēsam* by these three is what is meant by *Thripirēdya*. In support of this he points out that *Māthruvan*, *Pithruvan* and *āchāryavān* are mentioned in *Bṛuhadāraṇyam*. He also refers to another set of 'three' and says that these could be what Yama has said. But what he mentions first is mother, father and the guru by whom one is taught the right thing.

The reason why I said all this is because one should not think that *Āchāryā* has said that neither mother nor father is our refuge but only the guru and therefore whether we surrender to the guru or not we may discard the mother and the father. As it is the *dēvōtī* to the mother and the father is declining in the world. People try to explain it away in terms of generation gap etc. In such a situation one may wrongly understand the *Āchāryā* and discard the mother and father. Therefore I have pointed out all this. What *Āchāryā* said is that there is no use looking to the mother and the father for elevating oneself in the spiritual world. If it is understood to mean the worldly life it will be wrong. One should have *bhakti*, affection and gratitude to the mother and the father all the time. Yet for saving the soul and taking it to the ultimate goal, one should surrender only to the guru.

The mother and father devote more attention to physical growth and at the same time they will also teach good things to

some extent. But it is only the *āchāryā* who will take one on the right way only, attend to the needs of the soul and teach the means for the *āthmā* to attain the ultimate state.

One who gives such good *Upadēsam* and remains with him as a guide has been given the name of '*Dēsikan*' in view of the great help he is doing.

Although the father and the mother do a lot of things for us we find that because of their own likes and dislikes they make us take to the wrong way. If a boy does not want to marry but wants to take to *sanyāsam* the mother and father do not accept the boy's wish. They feel the son should earn well and they should also leave plenty of property for him and such other things which actually hurt spiritual growth. Even if a boy wants to observe some '*vratham* or *upavāsam*' there are some parents who would dissuade him from doing it by saying 'Why all this so soon?' Therefore although we should feel indebted to them for all time for their affection and sacrifice and do *namaskāram* to them if, because of their love for us, they prevent us from turning to the spiritual ways we have to firmly get hold of the *Dēsikan* only.

I have said earlier that the word '*dhich*' has two meanings. Similarly, the word '*āśā*' also has two meanings. When you use this word along with '*pāsam*' and talk of '*āśāpāsam*' it means the love born of ignorance. The other meaning is *dhisā* (direction). On the basis of this meaning, *Bhōjā* who was the royal poet has played pun in his *Ramayana Champu*. We all know that Agasthya Maharishi came to the South from the Himalayas and stayed there permanently. Referring to this, *Bhōjā* says '*apāstha samasthāsam abhyupaktha dakshināsam*' - Although Agasthiyar has renounced all desires he developed the desire for dakshin. In '*Dakshina āśā*' the word '*āśā*' means '*dhisā*' (direction).

Those who have their own likes and dislikes cannot show the direction for spiritual growth. It is only a *Dēsikan* who is specially

for that purpose can do it. He shows love and affection to the *śishyā* and makes sacrifice in no way less than the love shown by the mother and father and their sacrifice.

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THE 'CUCUMBER MUKTHI' OF THE JNĀNI

He is a great person (*mahān*) who is experiencing what is in the very ripe stage in which this world of duality which is like a magic show (*Indrajāl*) completely perishes. When a fruit becomes very ripe and leaves its stalk it is called 'proudān'. But it will not be correct to say that he gets detached. When his *jnāna* becomes ripe he continues to be in the state of his experience. It is the magic world of duality that has left him and gone away : 'Prouda prouda *nijānubhūthi kalitha dwaithēndrajāla*'. In Thrayambaka *Manthrā* also it is said that it is the *māyā* that goes away from the *jnāni* and it is not the *jnāni* who gets detached from *māyā*. It is a *manthrā* which is a prayer to *Paramēśwarā* that 'I should get released from attachment like '*Urvārugaṁ*' (cucumber). Attachment is the *māyā* of *samsāra*. That is the duality of '*Indrajāl*'.

What does it mean to say that one should get released like the ripe cucumber? When the cucumber becomes a fruit it does not fall off from a plant or a tree like other fruits. Cucumber is a creeper which grows and spreads on the ground. Therefore when the cucumber becomes ripe it cannot fall because it is already on the ground. But what happens is that the part of the creeper where the cucumber was lying attached to the stalk will move away leaving the cucumber where it is.

In the same manner, when it is said that a *jnāni* gets released from the attachments of *samsāra* it is not like a fruit falling from a tree. Even when he becomes a ripe fruit with his *jnāna* he will continue to be what he was. Although he may be engaging himself in external activities he will be at peace internally. He has no such

activity as leaving this world and going to some other place to attain the state of *mōksham*. Only the Dwaithis go somewhere else to attain the state of *mōksha*. The Adhvaitha *jnāni* even when seen with his body in this world, would have attained Self-realisation (*āthma sākshāthkāram*). That is the permanent state of *mōksham*. When it is said that he is in the state of 'release' he does not do anything to get released. All that he did was to enquire into the Self. Because of that he achieves Self-realisation and continues to be in that state of realization. In that stage the attachments and the world of *māyā* will themselves get cut off from him. Duality will run away from him. Just as the ripe cucumber from which its stalk has detached remains on the ground he will remain as '*Jīvan mukthā*'. But the attachment he earlier had with the mind and life which had taken deep root and spread like a creeper would have been cut off. Instead of his getting released these things get released from him and run away. This is called '*Cucumber Mukthi*'.

This is how I usually explain. After hearing this a vidwan said something more on the same lines. It is that the cucumber fruit which is lying in its place explodes one day and disappears without a trace. It does not decay and emit foul smell like other fruits. This is how when *jnāna* comes in a flash, *māyā* explodes and disappears. The vidwan said that he had understood that *manthrā* to mean that in one flash it disappears and he was giving the same explanation to others.

He further continued 'now I realize that your explanation about *Mukthi* being realized in the 'as is where is condition' is more appropriate. In the *manthrā* the word 'release' from bondage occurs. This is similar to the creeper moving away from the cucumber fruit and leaving it released. To describe the explosion of the fruit as release does not appear to be so appropriate'.

Although the vidwan said like this I thought there is a point in his own view. Maintaining whatever I had said and deriving a different meaning for the point which he mentioned I said that what I had said was *Jīvan Mukthi* and what he said was '*Videha Mukthi*' which follows it.

Jīvan Mukthi is the state in which even when a person appears to be of the world, *jnāna* comes, *māyā* moves away, his mind stops functioning and he is immersed in the experience of the Self. The delusion of the world cutting itself away from him was compared to the cucumber creeper cutting itself away from the cucumber fruit. Even when the delusion of the world goes away the *Jīvan Mukthā* continues to have his body. Although he himself is not conscious of the body we are able to see that he has a body. That body is there till his previous *karmā* is fully discharged and therefore he becomes victim of praise, abuse, disease, health etc. Although he does not experience through his mind the good or bad of all these, the body will be there as their target. (Although there are other views about *jnāni*-previous *karmā* - *prārabhdham* - I am referring to the general view). Just as the cucumber fruit remains with its form even after it is detached from the creeper the *Jīvan Mukthā* continues to be with his body even after his bondage to the world has gone. Later, one day - when his '*prarabhdam*' is over - the body dies. That is *Videha Mukthi*. When he is with the body and the *māyā* goes away from him and he is experiencing the Self it is *Jīvan Mukthi*. Just as the attachment of the mind goes away in that stage, in *Videha Mukthi* the connection with the body also goes due to the death of the body. The *prārabhdha karmā* which was still there even after he became a *jnāni*, now explodes and becomes nil.

Unlike what that vidwan thought there is attachment even in this (exploding and disappearing). The form of the fruit creates a bondage to the fruit. Even though the *jnāni* has no feeling of any attachment, so long as the body is there he has to walk, give it rest,

feed it etc. When he does these things we feel that he is attached to the body. When he attains *Videha Mukthi*, which appears to us as death, the bond with the body goes. For us, even after the physical body goes there will be the subtle body which will survive. It is that which goes to the other worlds - swarga, naraka and pithru *lōkās* and goes through various experiences. Then it takes another birth in another body. But for the *jnāni* even the subtle body does not survive the death of the physical body; going to other worlds, taking another birth etc are not for him and everything comes to an end with the death of the body. For us it is our *karmā* that is the cause for all these happening. But for the *jnāni* when the 'prārabhdham' is over and the body dies, the entire *karmā* gets finished. The bondage due to *karmā* goes away completely. When this happens without a trace the comparison of the cucumber fruit exploding and disappearing is appropriate.

Jīvan Mukthi which comes with the disappearance of the attachment of the mind is similar to the cucumber creeper cutting itself away from the fruit and the fruit remaining where it is. *Videha Mukthi* takes place when the attachment due to previous *karmā* and the consequent attachment to the body explodes and this is similar to the cucumber fruit exploding and disappearing without a trace.

A different explanation also occurs to me. When the *jnānis* who were *Jīvan Mukthā* like our *Āchāryā*, *Mānickavāchakar* and others attained *Videha Mukthi* at the end of their life their bodies did not suffer disease or decay and emit foul smell. Instead of their bodies becoming corpses they disappeared in the infinite even when they were in good health.

The cucumber fruit exploding and disappearing is like this. Or, we can say this is like that. In that *manthrā* it is said that *Thyambakēśwarā* who grants *Mukthi* is one with fine smell and one who increases the strength. In the comparison with the

cucumber fruit, in the case of the cucumber there will be noise when it explodes. But in the case of the *Mahāns* there is no noise but the *jyōthi* mixes with the *jyōthi* . That is, instead of sound they talk of the effulgence. Even that *jyōthi* is seen for just a second. It is as a mere formality. Then it becomes the formless Brahman which is spread in the infinite space. In fire works we see the light and also there is sound. But when the cucumber explodes it is only sound and when the *mahāns* 'go out' there is only *jyōthi* . This is not only for those who have followed the path of *jñāna* but also those who have followed the path of highest bhakthi like *Nandanār* and *Mīrābhair* . Their bodies did not become corpses but they disappeared and they got merged in the infinite. This also can be compared to 'cucumber mukthi'.

I told that Vidwan 'Of the two states of *Mukthi* , namely, *Jīvan Mukthi* and *Videha Mukthi* , my explanation can be applied to *Jīvan Mukthi* in which the attachment due to *māyā* goes away; your explanation can be applied to *Videha mukthi* which some great *jñānis* and great bhakthas have attained. In a competition sometimes it is decided that both the contestants have won a prize and the prize is divided between them. In the same way I have awarded the prize for both of us!'

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THE LOVE AND SACRIFICE OF THE GURU

I wanted to talk about the love and sacrifice of the great one who has gained the very ripe experience due to which *māyā* has run away from him and he has become guru.

Even when he is in this world he is in the state of rich inner experience. ' *Swānthē samyak iha anubhūtham* ' is what is said about the state. *Āchāryā* has made *ślōkās* which say that such a person has sung describing his state. It is called ' *Proudānubhūthi* '.

Why should a *Jīvan mukthā* who is totally immersed in experience describe his state? It is not necessary for him. He does not gain anything by so doing 'Yam labdhvā chāparam lābham manyathē nadhikam thathah' (*Gītā* VI - 22); one who, after attaining which will not consider anything else as a gain, gains nothing by singing about his state as a poetry. It may perhaps be something that would distract him from the bliss of his inner experience. It is true that whatever a *Jīvan mukthā* may do externally, there will be no distraction for him internally. But it is certain that he gains nothing by engaging in external activities. Why should he engage himself in such activity? Can he not continue to remain in the state of *samādhi*, allowing the body to perish and fall? Why then has he taken up this description? The reason for this has been given by the *Āchāryā* who himself had the very ripe experience and who has written a lot describing the state of the *Jīvan Mukthā*, has engaged himself in debates and written commentaries. He has said it in the manner of an autobiography but, hiding it due to humility, he has said it as if it is about some other *jñāni* :

'Sachchishya bōdhāya'

It means 'for giving *Upadēsa* to a good *sis̥hyā*'. It appears that the *jñāni* who has nothing to gain for himself by anything gives up his highest state of 'mounam', describes the state of a *jñāni* to a good *sis̥hyā* in order to encourage him to make efforts to attain that state himself. Even after the *jñāni* has become numb to all feelings it appears that *Īswarā* has allowed the feelings of love and sacrifice to remain in him for the sake of good *sis̥hyās*. We see that the guru has the feelings of love and sacrifice just as the mother and father.

Āchāryā has said '*Sachchishya bōdhayā sathyam samsmruthavān*'. '*Bōdhanā*' and '*Upadēsam*' are what are given through word of mouth. Before that he has to bring to memory the

state of experience, '*anubhūthi*'. He has to do '*Samsmaranam*' because he is a mouni not merely in respect of speech but also in the mind. He does not think anything. The mind which generates thoughts and records the events as memory has become actionless as far as he is concerned. Such a person has to return to the world of thought and get back to memory the state in which he was before he attained '*sākshāthkāram*' and the mind was destroyed.

For the *jnāni*, bringing back thoughts to the memory is as difficult as it is for us to give up thoughts. If we give up thoughts with great effort we gain from it. Therefore the trouble is worth it. But the *jnāni* has nothing to gain by bringing back thoughts to his mind with great effort. Yet he does it. Why? It is only for the sake of the *śishyā* - '*Sachchishya bōdhayā*'.

First, it is making the mind function, bringing back to memory the state of *sākshāthkāram*; then go down another step, allow the mouth also to function and then give *Upadēsam* to the *śishyā*.

The *jnāni* who is in need of nothing gets down to give *Upadēsam* and becomes a *Dēśikar* only because of his compassion for the *śishyā* that he too should find what he himself had found. This reminds me of the '*Itharēya Bāshyam*'.

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NO JNĀNAM WITHOUT GURU'S UPADĒSAM

One who has realized the *āthmā* which is so close to him becomes '*Idham thran*'. '*Idham*' is what is close by. '*Thra*' is related to seeing. Therefore, *Idham thran* means one who realizes the *āthmā* as the supreme thing within himself. Such a *jnāni* is *Idham thran*. Still the names of great people should not be repeated as they are. We should be afraid to repeat the name of one who is fit to be worshipped. That is why one letter is dropped from

‘Idham thran’ and it is called ‘Indran’ – this is what the *Ithareya* Upanishad says.

Life enters through the aperture at the top of the head and takes a birth; then it analyses the things; then realizes that he himself is the Brahma Swarupam spread all over and says ‘I have known Brahman here’; by saying this, gets the name ‘Idantran’; then out of respect and also because the *Dēvās* do not like to be seen, ‘Idantran’ becomes ‘Indran’ – the Upanishad goes on like this. But there is no reference to the guru in all these.

Āchāryā thought ‘How can a life analyse things by itself and attain *Brahma Jñānam*? It is not possible without the guru’s *Upadēsam* and his blessings (*anugraham*). Guru has not been mentioned because the role of guru is known to everyone. If a young man becomes a District Collector it is obvious that he has passed the I.A.S. In the same manner, if it is said that one has attained *Brahma Jñānam* it is understood that it was by guru’s *Upadēsam*. Still Āchāryā thought that he should make it explicit in his *bāshyam* (commentary). Therefore he has added ‘guru’s *Upadēsam*’ at the appropriate place. He has used powerful words in his *bāshyam* to bring out the greatness of the guru. He has said ‘The very compassionate Āchāryā has drummed into the ears the *Mahā Vākyās* of the Upanishad which give spiritual enlightenment and made him see the omnipresence of Brahman.’ Like beating a drum the guru gives *Upadēsam* of the non-difference between Brahman and *Jīvā* into the ears of the *śishyā* who is in the sleep of ignorance; with his *Upadēsam* he creates spiritual awakening. Just as we see things when waking up from sleep, the *śishyā* sees the Brahman.

No one should think that Āchāryā has taken liberty with the Upanishad and said what is not said there. It is the religion of the Upanishads that *jñāna* can be attained only through a guru. In *Chāndōgyam* it is said ‘If someone is left in an unknown forest

blind-folded it is only the person who has already known the way out of the forest who can help the other person to go out of the forest safe.' In the same way it is only a guru who is a *jnāni* who can show the way to the ignorant to attain *jnāna*. It is in that place it is said that it is only one who is *āchāryavān* will attain *jnāna* - *Āchāryavān Purushō Vēdhā*.

Mundakōpanishad (1.2.12) says '*Gurumēvāpigachchēth*' - *Gurum ēva api gachchēth* - one has to go in search of the guru only and find him. If in *Itharēyam* reference has been made to the one who analyses things, here reference has been made to the one who has examined the world. Both are same. Then the *Itharēya manthrās* speak as if such a person attains *jnāna* on his own. But here it is said 'the one who examines the world realizes that 'all these are connected with *karmā*. But the truth of the Self is not connected with *karmā*. That cannot be attained through what is connected with *karmā*'. We should develop aversion for worldly things, then for realizing the *āthmā* and experiencing it, we should take refuge unto a guru' - it says clearly. '*Gurumēvāpigachchēth*'.

When it is said 'one should take to a guru only' it actually means that he must, by all means, take to a guru and there is no alternative to it. The next *manthrā* says 'that guru who is a Brahma *Jnāni* will give him *Upadēsam* of Brahma *Vidhyā* and redeem him'. There is no scope for thinking that in his *bāshyam* (on *Itharēya Upanishad*) *Āchāryā* has added something unwarranted.

When commenting on '*Gurumēvāpigachchēth*' *Āchāryā* says 'the words *Guru ēva* (Guru only) have been used to make it clear that even a *sāsthrājna* who is well versed in *sāsthrās* should not himself take up the enquiry into *Brahma jnānam*.

It is only the one who has seen a thing that can show us the way. He is *Desīkar*, the spiritual guide.

THE GREAT MERITS OF THE WORD 'DĒSIKA'

It is because the word '*Dēsika*' has such merits that all of us even today offer our obeisance to *Āchāryā* by saying repeatedly '*Śankara Dēsika Mē Śaraṇam*' - the *Thōtakāshatakam* which *Āchāryā* himself in a subtle manner made *Thōtakāchāryā* sing.

Among *Vaiśhṇavās* they keep the name *Dēsikan* and *Dēsikāchāri*. In the name *Dēsikāchāri*, *Dēsikan* is the name, *Āchāri* is the name of the caste. Both have the meaning guru. It appears that they keep this name in memory of one of their important *āchāryās* namely *Vedānthā Dēsikar* who had been given the name *Vēnkatanāthā* by his parents.

Sri *Vaiśhṇavās* keep the name *Vedāntham* also. The fun here is that in the West *Vedānthā* is understood as Adhvaitha only. The direct meaning of *Vedāntham* is the final part of the *Vedhās* namely the Upanishad. Not only in the case of Adhvaitha but also in the case of *Visishtādhvaitha* and Dwaitha the respective *āchāryās* say that their philosophy is the real import of *Vedānthā* on the basis of the same Upanishad. Although *Rāmānujāchāryā* has not written *bāshyam* for Upanishad just as our *Āchāryā* has done and *Madhvāchāryā* in his *Brahmasūthra Bāshyam*, *Vedānthā Dīpam*, *Vedānthā Sāram* and other books has quoted in a big way from the Upanishads. For the *Visishtādhvaitha* philosophy the *Antharyāmi Brāhmaṇam* which is part of the *Bruhadāraṇyaka* Upanishad is quoted as the main support. Although *Rāmānujā* has not written *bāshyam* on Upanishads one Ranga *Rāmānujar* has written *bāshyam* on Upanishad in accordance with *Visishtādhvaitha* philosophy. What I wanted to say is that *Vedānthā* which is another name for Upanishad is largely understood as Adhvaitham only but the Adhvaithis do not keep the name *Vedāntham*.

Just as *Vedāntham*, it is only the Sri *Vaiśhṇavās* who keep the name *Bāshyam*. *Bāshyam* Iyengar, *Bāshyam* Reddy, *Bāshyam* Naidu are all *Vaiśhṇavās*. We who are *Smārthās* and a large

number of intellectuals praise (*Śankara*) *Āchāryā's* *bāshyam*. *Vaishṇavās* who have great *āchārya* bhakthi celebrate *Rāmānujā's* *Sūthra Bāshyam* as '*Sri Bāshyam*' and call *Rāmānujā* himself as *Bāshyakārar*.

Of the three words, *Guru*, *āchāryān* and *Dēsikan* the *Smārthā Brahmins* and the *Śaivas* who are not Brahmins keep the name *Guruswāmi*, *Gurumūrthi*. In most cases this is the name of *Swāmināthaswāmi*.

There is no practice in any tradition to keep '*Āchāryar*' as the name of a person. But *Vaishṇava* Brahmins keep names like *Rājagōpālāchāriār*. Among those who are not Brahmins the goldsmiths and the carpenters also add the suffix '*āchāry*'. They wear the sacred thread also. The *Madhva* Brahmins have the suffix '*āchār*'. We call the *Madhva* Brahmins who are in *Tamil Nadu* as *Rao*. They also keep the suffix *Rao*. But in the *Kannada* region where *Madhvāchāryā* himself had lived they keep the suffix '*āchār*' only. There, other than them all people keep the suffix '*Rao*'. In the *Kannada* and *Telugu* region many people keep the suffix '*Rao*' including those who are not Brahmins.

Among the *Śaivas* who are not Brahmins and who are priests there is a caste *Dēsikar*. I have said that the *Iyengars* keep the name *Dēsikan*. They call the important *āchāryā* of one of their sects as *Vedānthā Dēsikar*, *Swāmi Dēsikan* or merely *Dēsikan*.

The practice of *Vaishṇavās* keeping the name of *Rāmānujā* is widely prevalent. The *Madhvās* do not keep the name of the founder of their religion '*Madhvar*'. *Madhvāchāryā* had the *sanyāsa* name *Ānanda Tīrthar*. Even so, the *Madhvās* do not keep that name. We (*Smārthās*) keep the name *Śankara*. But it is difficult to say whether this is kept as the name of our *Kāladi Āchāryā* or the *Śankara* of *Kailasa*. Just as *Paramasivā's* names like *Vaidyanāthan*, *Viswanāthan* are kept, it is possible that the name *Śankara* is also kept. *Rāmānujā* means the younger brothers of

Rama, namely, *Lakshmanā*, Bharatha and *Śathrugna* but it particularly refers to *Lakshmanā* who was not only his younger brother but who was constantly with him. But when *Vaishṇavās* keep the name *Rāmānujā* they do not think of *Lakshmanā* or the other brothers of Rama but they think of their *āchāryā*, *Rāmānujā* only. I do not know whether we can talk of the name *Śankara* as *Āchāryā*'s name to that extent. (*Periyavā* laughs). In recent times (in 1957) from the time I came to Madras, *Āchāryā* has gained in popularity. These days although several fashionable names like Suresh, Ramesh etc are being kept many people keep the name Shankar in memory of *Āchāryā*. Many people keep the name *Chandrasēkara*. They call *Shēkar*. In the world of fashion also there are the names of these two old fashioned people. That also has been made fashionable by calling Shankar, *Shēkar*!

* * *

PARAMĀCHĀRYAR

The practice of having the suffix '*Dēśika*' prevails in the *Śaiva* Matalayas. The heads of these Mutts are called '*Dēśika Paramāchāryā Swāmigal*'. This is so in several *Śaiva* Mutts just as in our Adhvaitha *sampradhāya* we refer to the head of the Mutt as '*Paramahansa Parivrājākāchārya*'. It is true that the term *Paramāchāryā* can be used in respect of any *sanyāsi* who is having the status of a guru as a sign of respect. We can also refer as *Paramāchāryā* to one who is the *āchāryā* of our direct *āchāryā*. But here too the tradition in the '*Kānchi* Mutt' is that instead of *Paramāchāryā* he is called Paramaguru and the hierarchy of the gurus as Paramaguru, *Paramēshtiguru*, *Parāparaguru* etc. Therefore although a *Swāmi* of this Mutt can be occasionally referred to as *Paramāchāryā*, using it as if it is the important name appears to be contrary to tradition. Since, as a long time practice, the heads of *Śaiva* Mutts in the Tamil region have been called *Paramāchāryā Swāmigal* it appears that to use the same name for a

Matādhipathi of the *Smārthā* sect does not appear to be technically correct. Just as it has been laid down to whom the honorifics, His Excellency, His Highness, Hon'ble Justice etc are to be added I thought it would be better if it is considered how a *Matādhipathi* of a particular tradition is to be referred to and then it is used. So far as the *Matādhipathi* is concerned, if he is a *jnāni* he will not be concerned by whatever name he is referred to or even no name is mentioned. But I have referred to this aspect because, so far as the *śishyās* are concerned, they should not use a term for the *āchāryā* of their *Pītam* which is being used as a long time practice by people of another tradition. *

(* *Śishyās* who have known *Periyavā*'s thinking call him *Mahā Periyavā* or *Mahā Swāmigal* instead of calling him *Paramāchāryā*).

* * *

DĒVI AS DĒŚIKA

For our Mutt, *Ambāl Kāmākshi* is very important; She is its very life. There is a *sthōthrā* of five hundred verses about Her called *Mūkapanchasathi*. Mukar who sang this *sthōthrā* addresses Her in the very first ten verses as '*Gurumūrthē*' and says '*Namaskāram to you*': *Gurumūrthē thvam namāmi Kāmākshi*'. In several places in the *Panchasathi* he has referred to the fact that Adhvaitha *jnānam* materializes by Her blessings only. After referring to Her as *Durgāmbhā*, *Chāmunīdēswari*, *Annapūrnēswari*, *Varāhi* etc in the first ten stanzas, towards the end he says 'Mother! By your grace some people surrender at the feet of a guru and because of that climb the spiritual steps of *Saguṇa Upāsana* or *Nirguṇa Upāsana* and live in the palace of *moksham*.'

'*Sathkrutha Dēśika charaṇāḥ Sabīja nirbīja yōgā niśśrēṇyā*
Apavarga soudhā valabbhīm ārōhanthyamba khē(a)pi thava krūpayā
(Mūkapanchasathi - Āryāśathakam, ślōkā 97)

‘*Soudhā valabhi*’ means the upper storey of a palace. *Soudhām* means a palace. The direct meaning of the word is what is made of lime mixture - what is built of ‘*sudhai*’. The word ‘*sudhai*’ or ‘*sudhā*’ is a Sanskrit word for which the important meaning is ‘*amrutham*’. The lime mixture has been given the name of *amrutham* which is cool and pleasing! There is the practice of referring to the name of something which is exactly opposite in order to say in an auspicious manner what is not good. It is like calling an ‘idiot’ as ‘*bruhaspathi*’. This is euphemism. Looking at it from the point of the *Vēdānthā* it can be said that this practice is there in order to look even at what is bad as good. In the *ślōkā*, when talking of *mōksha*, using the word ‘*Sudhā*’ to refer to the building made of lime mixture has an inner meaning. It is the word ‘*sudhā*’ which has become ‘*soudhā*’ in the adjectival form. When *Ambāl* is worshipped through the ‘*Yōga mārḡā*’, in the end, the life force (*prāṇa śakthi*) will merge with the *Paramāthma Śakthi* and *mōksha* will materialize. At that time there will be flow of ‘*sudhā*’, that is a flow of *amrutham* there. The poet has used the words ‘*Soudha valabhī*’ to indicate that also. When *yōgā* is practiced as *Nirguṇam* it is done with the knowledge that ‘*sudhā*’ will flow. Even if nothing is known about it and worship is done with *bhakthi* in the *Saguṇa* mode, She will take the life force to the top and immerse it in the flow of *amrutham*. This *Saguṇam* - *Nirguṇam* have both been referred to as ‘*Sabijam, Nirbijam*’ in the *ślōkā*. Since the life force goes from the bottom to the top, reference to going up this ladder is also appropriate. The word ‘*niśrēṇī*’ means the ladder. *Śrēṇī* means a row. The term ‘*ēṇī*’ in Tamil (the ladder) has been derived from this word. Just as the word ‘*Sramaṇar*’ has become ‘*amaṇar*’ and the word ‘*Śrāvaṇī*’ has become ‘*āvaṇī*’ in Tamil, ‘*Śrēṇī*’ has become ‘*ēṇī*’.

It is only when there is *Parāśakthi*’s grace one will get a *sadguru* and also get the thought of surrendering to him. This is what he has said by ‘*sathkruthā Desika śaraṇā.....thava krupayā*’.

I wanted to say that here the term *Deśika* has been used for Sadguru. *Deśika* has the power to elevate one to *mōksha*.

If *Mūkar* has said about getting a *Deśika* by the grace of *Ambāl* and doing surrender to him *Kālīdāsā* has referred to *Ambāl* Herself as '*Deśika Rūpiṇī*'. Apart from his *Śyāmalā* Dandakam he has also written a *sthōthra* called '*Śyāmalā Navarathnāmālā*'. In that he has described Her as the form of guru (Guru swarūpiṇi):

Dayamāna dhīrga nayanām

Deśika rūpēṇa dharsithā(a)bhyudhayām

From the long and beautiful eyes of *Ambāl* grace flows. He says that She who bestows Her *katāksha* (glance) of grace comes in the form of *Deśika* - *Guru swarūpiṇī* - and shows 'abhyudhayam'. 'Abhyudhayam' means 'good rising'. It is a rising which is of a great nature. The words '*dharsitha abhyudhayam*' can be understood in two ways. One is that *Ambāl* shows to the bhaktha the great rising of Her anugraham. The other is that She shows the way for him to rise in the spiritual way.

In referring to the *katāksha* of grace followed by the reference to the form of *Deśika* there is a lot of meaning. It is the eyesight which guides one on the proper path. One who does not have eyesight has to be conducted by someone else. Therefore it amounts to the eye itself taking us. It is because the eye shows the way the legs walk accordingly. The word 'nayanam' also means to conduct, to go ahead and show the way, to lead. Our eyes show the way only to each of us. But *Ambāl*'s eyes shows the right path to all the people of the world by the *katāksha* of grace that flows from Her eyes. Any noble guru can give *diksha* to *sishyās* by his mere *katāksham* and conduct him on the right path. It is called '*Nayana dikshai*' or '*Śakshu dikshai*'. '*Śakshu*' means also the eye.

'*Mahāns*' have in their experience found *Mīnākshi* Amman as the guru who gives '*Śakshu dikshai*'. It is the belief that a mother

fish will make the young one come out of the egg by merely looking at it. In the same way *Mīnākshi* who has the eyes like the fish gives *Śakshu dikshai* and by that the spiritual truth which is inside the person like an embryo will attain full growth.

In *Manthrā Śāsthrā*, *Mīnākshi* Herself is called '*Śyāmalā*'. The three names, *Manthrīni*, *Māthanki*, *Śyāmalā* are all of *Mīnākshi* only. *Kālidāsā* has sung in *Navrathnamālā* only about Her. Therefore when he refers to Her glance of grace he indirectly makes it clear that She gives *Śakshu dikshai*. Then he says explicitly '*Dēsika rūpēṇa dharsītha(a)bhyudhayam*'.

Let us all pray that She who is *Jnānāmbikā* showers Her grace on all of us as *Dēsikā* and guides us on the right path.

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ADHVAITHAM





THE PRACTICE OF ADHVAITHAM

THE GIST OF RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHIES

The purpose of religion is to tell us : 'There is a supreme thing which is the cause of this universe. For us also it is the cause. It has created us. We are ordinary and simple *Jivāthmā*. But that is great *Paramāthmā*. We who are *Jivāthmā* should go and join that *Paramāthmā* again. Then only we will become free from *samsāra*, the cycle of birth and death, the harassment of *karmā* and the unending mental disquiet and attain the state of supreme bliss. That state in which we are released from the cycle of *samsāra* is called *mōksham*. Once that is attained we can experience permanent peace without death or decay' and also to show us the path by which we can reach the *Paramāthmā*.

Each religion has given a name to the *Paramāthmā*. One says it is 'Śiva'. One says it is 'Vishṇu'. Another says it is 'Śakthi'. They also say 'If you do like this you can go to *Kailās* which is the abode of Śiva. That is *mōksha lōkā*. Another says 'The abode of Vishṇu namely *Vaikuṇṭam* is *mōksha lōkam* and you have to do this to reach that abode'. In the same way, in each method of worship a different abode is mentioned as the place of *mōksha* - *Srīpuram* which is the abode of *Ambāl*. *Ānanda Bhuvanam*, the abode of *Vignēśwarā*, *Skandagiri*, the abode of *Subrahmaṇya*, *Sākētham*, which is the abode of Rama and *Golōkam*, which is the abode of Krishna. In each way of worship it is said that if one reaches the particular abode he will have permanent happiness and there is no worry of *samsārā*.

Each philosophy has its own view about the kind of relationship between the *Jivāthmā* and *Paramāthmā* in *mōksham*. One *siddhānthā* says that the *Jivāthmā* will be in *mōksham* but will remain entirely different from *Paramāthmā*, will be doing bhakthi

permanently and due to that will be enjoying permanent bliss. It is called Dwaitham. Another says even though *Jivāthmā* will remain separate in the state of *mōksha* and keep doing bhakthi it will have the awareness that *Paramāthmā* is its *Antharyāmi*. It is called *Visishtādhwaitham*. Another says, when the sun is up, the stars are very much there. But in the brightness of the sun they lose their lustre and are not seen. In the same manner, the *Jivāthmā* continues to be in the *mōksha lōkam* but it loses its little spark of *jñāna* and remains subdued in the *Paramāthmā*'s great intelligence.

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ADHVAITHAM WHICH IS SO DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS

The doctrine founded by *Ādhi Śankara Bhagavadhpādā* is called 'Adhvaitham'. What it says is a master stroke which is entirely different from all other doctrines. It discards the generally accepted basic tenet that the *Jivāthmā* escapes from this world to go to *mōksha lōkam* and joins the *Paramāthmā* and the related concepts such as the existence of this world, *mōksha lōkam* and the relationship that develops between the two. It says 'The world is not real. It is a mere illusion. There is no such place as *mōksham*. *Mōksham* is the state in which the *āthmā* gets freed from the mind*. It may happen here itself. Therefore instead of the belief that there is *mōksham* only after death one can become a *mukthā* even when life is in the body. It says that the *jñāni* who appears to us to be of the world is actually in the state of *mōksham*.

(* *Anthahkaraṇam* which gives individuality to a *jīvā* consists of the mind, buddhi, chiththa and ahamkaram. But in accordance with the usual practice of referring to the mind as *anthahkaraṇam*, mind has been used here).

There is no such thing as 'joining or uniting' in the context of the *Jivāthmā* and *Paramāthmā*. There is no relationship either. It is

only when there are two persons one can join the other and create a relationship. The reality is that *Jīvāthmā* and *Paramāthmā* are not two different things. What really is, is the *āthmā* only. It is also what is called 'Brahmam'. When it is all by itself, without nothing different from it and without any thought, it is *Nirguṇa* Brahmam. Yet, with the Brahmam as the substratum and at the same time hiding it, the *Māyā sakthi* (power of delusion) projects the world as a magic show. The picture in a cinema moves on a white screen. Without the screen there is no picture. Yet that picture itself hides the screen so that we cannot see it. Even if the screen is hidden, it is very much in its place. Similar to this, is the drama of the world of illusion taking place on the substratum of Brahmam. The great wonder in this is that even when the Brahmam is there as Brahmam on one side, on another side it gets into individual *anthakaraṇas* due to the *Māyā sakthi* and becomes individual *jīvās*. If by practice the *anthahkarṇa* are destroyed the *Jīvāthmā* will become Brahmam. In other words, there is no such thing as the *Jīvāthmā* and *Paramāthmā* uniting. The *Jīvāthmā* realizes that he is Brahmam. It is the same person who is *jīvā* when he has not realized his real state and Brahmam when he has realized it. The Brahmam which is under the bondage of the mind as a *jīvā*, when it shakes off that bondage and is by itself, it does not join anything. There is no relationship of any kind there. What relationship can we have with ourselves? Since *mōksham* is the state in which the bondage goes resulting in release, there is no scope for relating it to a *mōksha lōkam* - this is what Adhvaitha says emphatically.

When it is said 'If the mind is discarded we ourselves are Brahmam, *mōksham* is here itself', we wonder 'Such an achievement!, Gained so easily!'. When other doctrines say that the state in which there is the *Paramāthmā* above us and we are under Him is the final state of supreme bliss and to attain it we have to go to the *mōksha lōkam* which is beyond our reach, Adhvaitha which talks of the state of bliss in which we ourselves are the

'*Swāmi*' instead of a *Swāmi* being above us and we being under him, says that to reach that state there is no need to go to any other world which is beyond our reach but can attain it here itself. We wonder how we are able to get such a big gain so easily.

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WHAT APPEARS SIMPLE IS SO DIFFICULT

But it is only if the mind is discarded there will be Adhvaitha siddhi (achievement). To do that it will be extremely difficult. It is true that if the mind is given up, immediately there will be the supreme bliss of *mōksham*. But how to shake off the mind? If we are wearing a loose shirt we can take it off easily. If the shirt is tight it will be difficult to remove it. How much more difficult would it be if we are to take off our skin itself? Just as the skin is sticking to the body, the mind is firmly sticking to it inside. It is like dirt sticking to a cloth. If the dirt goes the cloth will become clean. There will be no need to make a new cloth. It is the existing cloth which is cleaned. In the same manner, it is not necessary to create the form of Brahman for the *jīvā*. It is enough if the mind which is covered by dirt is cleaned up. He himself will stand with his real form of Brahman. But it is found impossible to remove the dirt which is sticking so firmly.

The mind is not amenable to destruction easily. What is mind? It is the instrument which generates thoughts. If thoughts are arrested the mind will cease to be. But it is impossible to arrest the thoughts. The mind always wanders somewhere or the other. We have had innumerable experiences and we continue to have them - what we know in this birth and what we had in previous births of which we are not aware. The impression of each of them has taken root in the mind and gives rise to some thought or the other without a break. Do we not see that even when asafoetida is exhausted its smell continues to remain in the box in which it was

kept? In the same manner even after our experiences are over, their scent (impression) continues to be there. It is that which is called impression of the previous births. What it does is that it will keep on stirring up thoughts in the mind about those experiences. It will make the mind to plan how the same experiences can be had again. It is only when the 'scent', the impression, goes - this is called the decline of the impression (*vāsana kshayam*) - the mind will stop.

When it is said that the mind will stop it means that it will cease to exist. When something which is running comes to a stop that is its end. The flood of water keeps running. If it is stopped in its course by a dam, its run stops. Similarly, when it is said that the mind which is continuously running comes to a stop it means it has met its end.

Mind stopping due to concentration on a single thing is something; what I refer to as stopping is something different. When the mind is concentrated on one thing it is that one thing which will fill the mind. Nothing else will come up in the mind. Keeping the mind concentrated on one thing is also difficult. It is the step previous to eliminating the mind. As long as a wild animal keeps running hither thither how can we aim at it and shoot it? If it is made to stop at one place, we can shoot it. Similarly, only if we make the mind which is wandering in different thoughts, to concentrate on one thing we can 'shoot' it. When the mind is concentrated on one thing it is not absent but is very much there. The state of concentration on one thing is preliminary to the destruction of the mind. The mind should cease to be there. Only then there will be Self-realisation - the thinking that one is a *Jīvā* will go and he will know himself as *Brahmam*.

But it seems impossible, despite stupendous efforts, to keep the mind concentrated on one thing, then remove and throw away the root of the thoughts and destroy the mind down to the roots.

The reason is that so much dirt - the dirt of ignorance - is so thickly spread on the cloth of mind from a time which is indeterminable.

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MOKSHAM THROUGH ĪŚWARĀ'S GRACE (ANUGRAHAM)

Yet if the effort is not given up, *Īśwarā*'s grace will materialize and if not in this birth, in a future birth, the great goal, the great bliss, namely, Brahma *Sākshāthkāram* - the realization that one is Brahman and remaining in that permanent state - will be achieved.

I have referred to the grace of *Īśwarā*. Who is that *Īśwarā*? Although the world of beings and inert matter is the show of *māyā* there is so much order in that show. It is not an incoherent and mad dance but a beautiful drama. In that the petty mind of man may be indulging in mad dance but from the sun and the moon, the planets and the stars and upto the movement within an atom, all are taking place in an orderly and disciplined manner. There are great people who have arrested the mind and from them so many disciplines and *dharma* have come to us as means to arrest the mind. With the unfailing law of cause and effect, countless things are interlinked with each other and there is order in the universe and life in it has been going on over the aeons without getting derailed. When we consider all these, although from the philosophical point of view there is no difference between the *jīvā* and Brahman and the world is *māyā*, looking to the practical state, we will know that there must be a great intelligence, a great power which conducts all these things according to a plan. That is called '*Īśwarā*'.

It is Brahman in association with *māyā* (there is no association as such but appears to be associated) functions as *Īśwarā* who causes the world of beings and controls it. The entire universe is under His control. Therefore if we are to be freed from

māyā, get released from His control and realize that we are the Brahman which is His *ātmā* it is not possible without his permission. In other words, it is only by the grace of *Īśvarā* that the mind has to stop and get destroyed.

It is *Īśvarā* who gives the fruits for all actions in the *māyā lōkam*. In this, it is in accordance with millions of rules he has made that each action has a particular result. The fruit for each one of our actions is also given by him. It is the performance of *karmās* and the fruits of such *karmās* which cause repeated births and make us keep moving in the wheel of *samsāra*. It is only when *karmā* stops it is possible to become the actionless Brahman. It is the mind that prods us into action. All our actions are according to the desires of the mind and its prodding. Therefore it is only when the mind stops *karmā* will stop. But the mind refuses to stop on its own. How can anything destroy itself? Can a revolver shoot itself? Therefore what the mind can do is to intensely thirst for its own destruction and continue to think of the non-dual state that will follow its destruction. This is called '*Nidhidhyāsanam*' (constant remembering). The gist of Adhvaitha *Sādhnam* (the practice of Adhvaitha) is this constant thinking with perseverance. This is also an action. Just as it is the function of the leg to walk and of the mouth to eat, it is the function of the mind to think.

I said that it is *Īśvarā* who considers all actions and gives fruits. He will be watching this action of *Nidhidhyāsanam* also. If we go on doing it uninterrupted He will decide 'He has done the *Nidhidhyāsana karmā* to the extent of nullifying all his previous *karmā*' and will shower His grace by eliminating our mind which shows us as different from Brahman. This is what is meant by saying that Brahma *Sākshātkāram* will materialize by the grace of *Īśvarā*. It is not that He will shower His grace if we do spiritual practice to the extent of nullifying all our previous *karmā*. If He is to be so calculative in showing His grace it is not grace at all. When something is done calculatively like a trader or an accountant it is

not called 'anugraham'. When it is done with love, sympathy, the willingness to pardon and with consideration that is anugraham.

I think of a meaning for the word 'anugraham'. 'Anu' means 'following'. 'Graham' means 'to get hold of'. When we follow *Īśwarā* in *Nirguṇa Brahma Swarūpam* and try to get hold of Him, *Īśwarā* also follows us and gets hold of us - this is anugraham. Instead of being keen to get hold of Him, this mind will run somewhere. But His following it and making it take hold of Him is anugraham. 'Him' means '*Īśwarā*' who is in association with *māyā* and also Brahman not associated with *māyā*. Although *Īśwarā* also is associated with *māyā* like us, He is not subservient to *māyā* and has not forgotten His own true form like us. He has *māyā* under his control and does so many '*māyā* actions' but still he is in the state of experiencing the Brahman. Therefore even if we get hold of Him as the *Īśwarā* with *māyā* He will unite us with Him as Brahman unassociated with *māyā*.

This is how there is a 'running race' between the *jīvā* and *Īśwarā*. When the *jīvā* tries to get hold of him He will not allow Himself to be caught thinking if we give Him the highest form of wealth, namely, *sākshāthkāram* when he has so much *karmā* yet to be nullified it is neither just nor it is *dharmā*; because of this the mind of the *jīvā* becomes tired and thinks 'we are unable to catch Him' and then goes after all sorts of things; at that stage *Īśwarā* follows him with compassion, gets hold of him and makes him get hold of Himself; yet, since doing this all at once leniently is not in accordance with the *dharmā* related to *karmā*, He does it in a subtle manner and in a way that the *jīvā* does not know that He is following him and catching him gently and makes the mind involve itself in spiritual matters now and then. Instead of the *jīvā* tightening such a light grip and getting released before the due time, it slips away from Him and allows the mind to go haywire; *Īśwarā* takes pity on him thinking 'If we keep ourselves away from Him because we think that He should not get immersed in 'amruth'

so soon, he does not dip himself even in water but gets sunk in gutter water', allows Himself to be caught slightly - after doing tug of war like this for quite some time He makes the *jīvā* involve the mind fully in the goal and at that time *Īswarā* bestows his grace and takes him to *sākshāthkāram* - this is how it happens.

The one who gives the fruits, 'the phaladatha' and functions as a judge has the right to be strict and calculative in giving the fruits. If He acts in that manner, we have no right to say that He is unfair. Yet, with great compassion, He reduces the effects of *karmā* considerably, condones and showers His grace. If He is not very strict, He is not very lenient either. Will it not be wrong if the highest of the states is granted permanently without looking into the merits of the person to whom it is granted? When a sentence of ten years in jail is reduced by two or three or even five years, we can say that justice is tampered with mercy. If the reduction of sentence is more than that the question could be asked whether there is justice at all. But here it does not stop with punishing - punishing for the crime of *karmā* - and deciding. When the matter does not end with the destruction of the *karmās* and of the mind but the great reward of *sākshāthkāram* materializes, *Īswarā* can pardon only to some extent.

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EFFORT HAS TO BE CONTINUED EVEN IF THE GOAL IS DELAYED

There are two names - *Jnānavan* and *Jnāni*. *Jnānavan* is one who has, by listening to others and by his own study, understood that the *āthmā* is really Brahman itself and makes efforts to make that knowledge as his own experience. He is a cut above the ordinary people. *Jnāni* is one who has attained that experience; one who has gone to the peak. *Bhagawān* says in *Gītā* that even that *Jnānavan* comes to Him only after several births; that is he attains the state of Brahman which is his *āthmā* too;

‘*Bahūñam janmanām anthē*’ means ‘at the end of several births’. In another place also He says ‘*anēka janma samsidhdhas thatho yāthi parāngatim*’ (Chapter 6-45). It means that the highest state can be attained only by attaining siddhi gradually through several births. Even this achieving of *sākshāthkāram* after several births is due to His mercy and by His giving us a lift. Otherwise even that ‘several’ births would be much more. This is because the goal to be attained is very big. Is it an ordinary thing to become Brahman itself? The one who tries to attain that goal is so small. Naturally it will take several births to attain it. Even if a big king has to gain victory over another kingdom he has to engage himself in war. If a single individual sets out to take over the kingdom how much effort will be needed! It is the same when a *jīvā* sets out to gain the spiritual empire.

On the one side the matter appears so simple. Instead of our having to make efforts to reach a *Swāmi* somewhere in *Vaikuṇṭham* or *Kailās* if the goal is to know ourselves it appears to be simple. We also feel ‘what is the difficulty in our being ourselves?’ But when this is practiced it is seen that nothing else can be more difficult than this. In *Katōpanishad* it is said that this practice is like walking on a razor’s edge. But still because of the difficulty there should be no hesitation in pursuing the practice. As if giving a firm command and at the same time with great tenderness it is said ‘Get up! Wake up! There are great *āchāryās*, go and take refuge unto them and know the thing. You can walk easily even over the razor’s edge and pass the test.’ It mentions both the difficulties in the practice and the way to overcome it. All in all, it is clear that the practice is a hard one. *Gaudapādhā* who was *Āchāryā’s* *Āchāryā* has said almost in the manner of threatening ‘*Adhvaita* is the salvation’. But, to achieve it even many among *Yōgis* are afraid. This is because only if continued effort is made - like trying

to empty the ocean by taking out water from it with the tip of a darbha grass - all thought can be thrown away from the mind and remain as *āthmā*'. But the reason why he wrote like this is that it is possible to shake off the thoughts. At the same time, what is clear from all this is that it is extremely difficult to eliminate the false 'I' and be the true 'I'. The false 'I' is the mind which is the creation of *māyā*. The true 'I' is the Brahman which is the truth.

However difficult it may be and whatever number of births it may take, we have to start the effort for it now itself. If we keep on postponing, the janma will also go on increasing. Suppose we do not take to spiritual practice even now, what will we do then? We will commit more wrongs. Due to this additional new *karmās* the dirt in the mind will increase and also get more hardened and janma will go on increasing. Therefore the intelligent way is to start the effort to escape as soon as possible.

I said we should 'make effort to escape'. In between I have said 'We should try'. These two are called '*Sādhana*' (practice). Not knowing what to do and not doing something on our own but to make effort on the strength of what the great people who have attained the goal tell us is '*Sādhana*'.

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SĀDHANA CHATHUSHTAYAM

THE PATH LAID DOWN BY ĀCHĀRYĀ
ON THE LINES OF VĒDHĀS

With great compassion our *Āchāryā*, *Śankara Bhagavadhpādha*, has laid down a system of *Sādhana* for attaining the goal of Adhvaitham. Just as we say that the head is the most important part of the body *Śruthi* also has such a head. It is '*Śruthi Śīras*' - the Upanishad. *Āchāryā* has raised a mansion on the foundation of what is said in the Upanishad.

He has formulated a system for *sādhana* called '*Sādhana Chathushtayam*' which has four parts. In his (Brahma) *Sūthra Bāshyam* which is the crown of all his works, in the commentary on the very first *sūthra* he starts with 'We will now tell when (after doing which) enquiring into Brahman can be commenced' and says '*Nithyā Nithyavastu vivēkah*' and refers to the four parts of this Chathushtayam.

If his *Sūthra Bāshyam* occupies the first place among all his *bāshyas* (commentary on existing works) *Vivēka Chūdāmaṇi* occupies the first place among his original works. In this he has clearly described the characteristics of all the four parts of *Sādhana Chathushtayam*'.

*'Sādhanānyathra chathvāri kathithāni Manīshibhihi
Yēshu sathsvēva sannishtā yadhabhāvē na sidhdhyathi'*

(Sloka 18)

By the statement '*Sannishta yadh abhāvē na sidhdhyathi*' he asserts conclusively that 'nishta' in 'sath vasthu' will not materialize and get stabilized without these four means : By saying '*Yēshu sathsu Yēva sannishtā*' he says that only if these four are achieved then there will be 'nishta' in 'sath vasthu'. He starts with saying 'four ways for this spiritual *Sādhanā* have been laid down by *manīshīs* and says that if these are undertaken there will be siddhi but not otherwise - '*Sādhanāni athra chathvāri kathithāni manīshibih*'.

Who are the *manīshīs*? All of us are ordinary human beings. Those among us who can, with their high intellectual ability, determine what is right and what is wrong and who are *sishtās* and *sāsthrājñās* are *Manīshī*. *Āchāryā* introduces *Sādhana Chathushtayam* by saying in the traditional way of offering respect to elders that this has been drawn up by the *Manīshīs*.

Āchāryā has written a work called 'Aparōkshānubhūthi'. 'Aparōksham' means 'face to face'. Aparōksham is having direct experience of Brahman instead of just knowing that one is Brahman through others or through studies. In this work also, he has spoken about the Sādhana. He has written a small book called 'Bālabhōdha Sangraham'. Even in this he has referred to this subject.

In the Saraswathi Mahāl library in Thanjāvūr there is a book Sādhana Chathushtaya Sampaththi, the author of which is not known. Sampaththi means Sampath (wealth). The Sādhana is great wealth to us.

Chathushtayam means an aggregate of four things. Although there are four, in the third one namely, 'Samādhi Shadga Sampaththi' there are six parts - just as there are several parts like the eyes, ears, nose etc in the head. Since one part itself has six divisions in it, the Sādhana consists of nine steps. But these steps are not to be followed one after the other in the order in which they are given. It will be necessary to know the basics of all the nine steps and then progress by giving importance to each one of them. During practice what is main will become subsidiary later and what is subsidiary will become main. The steps will be mixed and in each stage one will be important.

First of all 'āthma vidhyā' should be learned properly which means that it should be learned through a guru. Then only his anugraham will also get inside and prod us to follow that path properly. Secondly, the Upadēsam must be made firm in the mind. Then, for making it into experience we should devote ourselves to 'āthma vichārā' (spiritual enquiry)*

(*Periyavā has referred here to Śravaṇam, Mananam and Nidhidhyāsanam which come after Chathushtayam.)

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KARMĀ AND BHAKTHI - PRELIMINARY TO JNĀNA

There are three others - *karmā*, *bhakthi* and *jnāna*. What *Āchāryā* has said as *Adhvaitha Sāadhanā* is *jnāna mārgā*. But for one who wants to take to this path, the mind should be pure and be capable of concentrating on one thing. Then only he can go in that path without difficulty. How to clear the impure mind and go to the practice of *Jnāna Yōgā*? If mind is to remain concentrated on one thing, before undertaking *Jnāna Yōgā*, how to do it?

It is only for cleansing the mind and making it remain concentrated on one thing, *Āchāryā* has prescribed *karmā* and *bhakthi* at the very beginning.

If seeds are sown on dry land will they sprout? First of all, the land has to be tilled and then watered. Then only the seed sown in the field will sprout, grow and produce a crop. *Karma yōgā* is like tilling the mind which is hard and making it light.

As one goes on doing the *karmās* laid down for him in *sāsthrās* as *swadharmā* the impurity of the mind will start going away.

Worship through *bhakthi* will help us to make the mind remain concentrated on the Lord. Once the mind is trained to remain concentrated on a *Mūrthi*, it will be possible for it to remain concentrated on a formless truth and do spiritual enquiry.

Once the mind is purified by *karmā* and is made to remain concentrated by *bhakthi* one can progress in *Jnāna Yōgā* without much difficulty.

I have mentioned purification of mind through *karmā* and concentration of mind through *bhakthi* as if they are easy. But in the state in which we are when we go on doing something without knowing what is *karmā* and what is *bhakthi* we will feel that nothing is happening by what we do.

ŚRADDHĀ (FAITH) IS NECESSARY

Therefore I am saying now itself : This *Sāadhanā* will take a long time. Progress will be very very slow. Therefore no one should feel 'this is not possible. Probably I have not done it properly. Is there no redemption for me?' There is no need to feel discouraged or dispirited or lose faith. No need to give up the practice in despair.

Those who act with perseverance never fail. Without losing heart if we go on with our practice, however long it may take, progress will be seen and we can reach the goal. The faith that 'Swāmi will not let us down. The path shown by *sāsthrās* and the guru will not go in vain' is what is called *śraddhā*.

When in the ordinary course of our talk we say that someone did something with *śraddhā* we use the word to mean that he did it sincerely and wholeheartedly. But the fact is that the term mainly denotes faith. What one does with sincerity born out of faith is 'doing with *śraddhā*'.

In matters which have direct proof there is no need for faith. But for many things which are said in religious *sāsthrās* there will not be such direct proof; some will even appear to be contrary to what is actually seen. All religions say that when we do 'puṇya' we will be rewarded with good things and if we commit sins we will get bad things. But in real life we find that those who indulge in sins live comfortably and those who do *puṇya karmā* suffer. Our Hindu *sāsthrās* explain it thus : 'It is not necessary that the fruits of *puṇya* and sinful *karmā* should be had in one life only. Fruits continue to materialize in several births. If today a sinner is enjoying and a virtuous person is suffering it means that in earlier *janmās* the former had done *puṇya* and the latter had committed sin. We cannot have proof for this. It is here that faith is required. Similarly many other things have to be accepted on the basis of faith.

We talk of *āsthikās* (believers) and *nāsthikās* (the non-believers). *Āsthikā* is not one who merely believes in god. What is the use of just thinking that there must be a *Swāmi* who is the cause of and the force behind everything? That *Swāmi* keeps a watch over all our actions and accordingly grants the fruits of *puṇya* or sin; He is also the merciful one who gives the *sāsthrās* through the rishis for us to follow the right path; By sending *āchāryās* to the world and Himself taking *avathārs* He shows the right way; therefore only if we have the faith that with fear of His judgement and by following the *sāsthrās* and the *Upadēśas* of the guru we would get redeemed it will be useful. It is this faith which is called '*āsthikam*'. That is, it is only *śraddhā* which is *āsthikam*. In his commentary on the *manthrā* in *Chandōgyōpanishad* which says that *śraddhā* is *āsthikam*, *Āchāryā* refers to both in a short sentence: '*Āsthikya buddhih śraddhā*'.

In this context, I feel that the Westerners have gone a step ahead of us. What we call 'matham' means 'what is got by mathi' (intellect). A doctrine that has been arrived at on the basis of proof through intellectual research is 'matham'. Also to believe 'even though we cannot prove it, what the *sāsthrās* and elders say must be correct', is also 'matham'. Still the important meaning for matham is what one concludes after thinking for himself through his intellect and then gets convinced of it. It is not a belief in what others say. That is why there is the separate word '*śraddhā*' for it. But the Westerners call religion itself as 'Faith'. They have given so much importance to faith in matters of religion. Although, later, they only started giving considerable place for reason in religion and influenced our people also along that line, in earlier times they must have considered only faith in *sāsthrās* as religion and therefore used the word 'faith' for religion.

'*Śraddhā*' is very important. I shall talk more on this when we see *śraddhā* being an important element at the height of *Adhvaitha sādhanā*. The *śraddhā* which I now talk about is like a seedling for what will be seen later as a big tree with deep roots.

One has to swim along the seashore holding the breath. That practice only gets stronger and stronger and gives the ability to hold the breath for a long time, dive deep into the ocean to collect the pearl oysters. The basic *śraddhā* now being mentioned is like swimming close to the seashore. The *śraddhā* that develops later is like diving into the ocean for the pearl. The Tamil word 'muthu' for 'pearl' is derived from 'muktham'. 'Muktham' means getting released. What comes out (gets released from) oyster is *mukthām* (pearl). Getting released from *samsārā* is 'Mukthi'.

A poet noticed *Ambāl's* smile. He compared the brilliance of Her white teeth to the shine of the conch shell. Immediately another poet went to quarrel with him saying 'How can you compare a conch shell and the smile of *Ambāl*? The conch shell throws away the '*mukthām*'. But *Ambāl's* smile is so pleasing to the '*mukthās*'.

*'Mukthānam parimōchanam vidadhathas
thath prīthi nishpādhinī'*

Although in the sequence of practice, *śraddhā* has been mentioned before the stage of attaining *Mukthi* just as taking out pearls, what I have been talking about is the *śraddhā* that should be there in the beginning for everything.

If with prayer to *Vignēśwarā* we make a beginning on the spiritual path one day or the other we can reach the goal. The *Sādhanā* should be done with the faith 'irrespective of when it may happen since the path has been shown by the *Vedhās*, confirmed by Krishna *Paramāthmā* in *Gītā* and later our *Bhagavadhpād* had laid down fully, one day we will gain the experience of being Brahman ourselves'.

One has to start with *karmā* and bhakthi and move to *jnāna*. Our mind is like a mirror which is covered with dirt and is also oscillating. Therefore matters relating to *jnāna* do not get reflected in it. The dirt must be wiped off by doing *karmā*. By constant

bhakthi its movement should be stopped. Once it is cleansed of dirt and it remains steady matters relating to *jnāna* will get clearly reflected.

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THE QUALIFICATION FOR SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Āchāryā has said that only after the impurity of the mind is gone and it becomes steady one should embark on '*āthmā Sādhana*' in a real and serious way. He has clearly said that it is only to the one who has mastered *Karma yōgā* and *Bhakthiyōgā*, *Sādhana Chathushtayam* is possible.

'*Swa varnāśrama dharmēṇa thapasā harithōshaṇāth
Sāadhanam prabhavēth pumsām vairāgyāthi chathushtayam*'

(*Aparōkshanubhūthi - Sloka 3*)

'*Swa varnāśrama dharmam*' for one is his *karmayōgam* according to *sāsthrās*. *Harithōshaṇām* means *Īśwarā* being pleased. We are doing '*Īśwara prīthartham*'. Instead of a separate *pūjā*, doing one's *swadharmā karmā* as an offering to *Īśwarā* according to *Gītōpadēsam* is itself bhakthi. In *Sōpāna Panchakam* which Āchāryā gave in his last *upadēsam* he says 'Observe the *karmā* well and in a manner that that itself becomes *Īśwarā pūjā*'. But since it is not easy to do all *karmās* with the attitude of *Īśwarā ārāadhanā* (worship) Āchāryā has also spoken of the worship of *Īśwarā* with bhakthi. It is bhakthi which is referred to here as *Harithōshaṇām*. Hari does not mean only *Vishṇu*. It is the practice to say Hari Ōm; here Hari refers to all deities - *Saguṇa* Brahman. Here too, it has the same meaning. *Thōshaṇām* means 'to please'. If we practice bhakthi to *Bhagawān* with love, He feels satisfied and pleased in the thought 'He is coming on the right path'. So *Harithōshaṇām* means *bhakthiyōgā*. Along with *Harithōshaṇām* he has also said '*thapasā*'. 'Thapas' need not be taken as the third one. We should take it that *swadharmam* and *Harithōshaṇām* should be done with involvement and without minding the physical

discomfort. It is for those who do like this *Sādhana* Chathushtayam will be possible; they only deserve it. It is like going to the college after study in the high school is over. *Āchāryā* says 'first of all cleanse your mind; make it remain steady in one goal; you pass this test and then you can embark on *āthma vichārā* (spiritual enquiry). The *vichārā* to become the actual experience may be still later.

Since it is said like this, it does not mean that unless one attains absolute purity of mind and total concentration he should not think of *āthma vidhyā* at all. If these are fully attained then there will be no need for *sādhanā*; immediately the mind will remain steady in the *Upadēsam* of the guru and *sākshāthkāram* will materialize. There will be no scope for *sādhanā*. There is no need for *Āchāryā* to lay down a plan for practice for such a person. We should understand *Āchāryā*'s thinking correctly; it is only when one enters the path of *Sādhanā* after achieving substantial purity of mind and concentration and reading the '*āthma sāsthrās*' he can progress with wholehearted involvement; otherwise it will all be superficial and a mere feeling that one has known everything.

The Buddhists said 'We have opened the door for everyone.' But they did not meet with success by so doing. That is why *Āchāryā* has said that one who has the necessary qualifications for it can only progress sincerely.

There are some people who say 'all are entitled to Adhvaitha *Sādhanā*. No particular qualification is required for it. After all he is going to know his own real state. What is the qualification required for one to become oneself? It is enough if he has a thirst to know himself. In the force of such a thirst if he realizes that the mind is not himself, anyone can attain *sākshāthkāram*. Self-realisation is the birth right of everyone. No qualification should be prescribed for it.' Among such people some might have become *jñānis*. Some others like some Westerners who were in

gruhashthāśrama, in business etc in their younger days and who have taken refuge unto such *jnānis* might have done spiritual enquiry and attained *jnāna*. But among those who speak like this and those who listen to them there will be hardly one or two out of hundred who would have attained siddhi. Those with intellectual ability who engage themselves in the study of *Vēdānthā* and think about *āthmā* and *jnāna* can talk and write well. They can present papers, write thesis etc. What they say and the way they say will so impress people that they will think they have had *sākshāthkāram*. Yet, only one out of a thousand such persons would have experienced it. But those who are experienced, it is said, will be silent like *Dakshināmūrthi*. It is only very few people - like our *Āchāryā* - who were prompted by *Īśwarā* for the sake of the welfare of the world who have written and spoken about '*āthma vidhyā*'. Some people, instead of doing a lot of *karmānushtānam* and practice of bhakthi and then taking to *sanyāsa* and doing spiritual enquiry (*adhyāthma vidhyā*) attain siddhi directly and say that any one can attain like that.

Those who attain siddhi so easily are of a special category; they must have performed *karmā* and practiced bhakthi and attained purity of mind and concentration even in their previous life. They must have had the grace of *Īśwarā* in this birth and attained siddhi. They do not belong to the ordinary run of people. If such persons had gone to *Āchāryā* he too would have shown them a path exclusive to them. But since as Jagadguru when he wrote for all the world he has kept in view the state of ordinary people and prescribed qualifications on the basis of *Karma yōgā* and *Jnāna Yōgā*.

Accordingly, he has laid down the steps called *Sādhana Chathushtayam*: only the one who has achieved purity of mind and concentration to some extent, examines what is permanent and what is ephemeral on the basis of Adhvaitha *sāsthrās*, takes what is to be taken and rejects what is to be rejected and starts with this

vivēka, will go to the stage of '*mumukshuthā*' in which he will get the keen desire to attain what is permanent.

The *sāadhanā* does not end with this. This is like studying B.A. or M.A. in the college. Just as there is Ph.D above this, a keen desire (*mumukshutha*) will take one to *sākshāthkāram* which is *Mukthi*. With that it is full stop.

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THE HIGHEST SĀDHANĀ IS ONLY FOR THE SANYĀSI

With *Mumukshuthvam* it is the end of the second stage. Removing the impurity of the mind and making it remain concentrated by *karmā* and *bhakthi* is the first stage. The second stage is *sāadhanā* *Chathushtayam* by practicing which the impurity of the mind would have been fully cleansed and the concentration of the mind would be further ensured. May be there will be a balance of these to the extent of 5 or 10%.

At such a time the *mumukshu* goes to the third stage to take *sanyāsam*, discarding everything. It is *Āchāryā's* doctrine that in the last stage it is only the *sanyāsi* who is competent to go for the *Sāadhanā* to have *āthma sākshāthkāram*. His doctrine which is based on what the Upanishads say is that the supreme bliss of experiencing *Brahmam* (*Brahmānubhavam*) is only for the *sanyāsi* who has given up everything including all worldly activities and engages in *āthma vichāram* as the exclusive *Sāadhanā*.

He has said that in the third stage taking *sanyāsam* from a guru, receiving from him the *manthra upadēsam* of the non-difference between the *jīvā* and *Brahmam*, then constantly thinking on it, then the thought coming to a stop - then one will have the great experience of merging with the goal.

Some people ask the question '*Āchāryā* has said that the *Upadēsam* of the *Mahā Vākya* about the non-difference between the *jīvā* and *Brahmam* is only for the *sanyāsi*. But the *Mahā*

Vākya which occurs in *Sāma Vēdhā* was given as *upadēsam* to *Swēthakēthu* who was a *brahmachāri* in his youth by his father.

In every '*Śākā*' of *Vēdhā* there is a Upanishad and a *Mahā Vākya* in it which proclaims the non-difference between the *Jivā* and *Brahmam*. Originally, there were more than one thousand *śākās*. Now there are only seven *śākās*. Although every *śākā* has one *Mahā Vākya* it is the practice to give as *upadēsam* at the time of *sanyāsa dīkshai* one *Mahā Vākya* from each *Vēdhā*, that is four *Mahā Vākya*s in all. In what comes in the *Itharēya upanishad* of *Rig Vēdhā* it is not said who gave *Upadēsam* to whom but it comes at the end of several *manthrās* of the Upanishads which the rishi *Mahīdāsa Itharēyar* gave - in the *manthrā* which is one previous to the last. From what has been said in the last *manthrā* and from the fact that mention has been made in the previous chapter about the rishi *Vāmadēvar* who attained *Brahmajnānam* even while in the womb, we can guess that this *manthrā* occurred to him on its own by *Īśwarā* anugraham. In other words, it can be said that it is what *Īśwarā* Himself gave as *Upadēsa* to a *Brahmajnāni*. Therefore, there is justification to say that it should be given as *Upadēsa* to a *sanyāsi* who is in the fourth *āśrama* and therefore who is worthy of receiving it.

The *Mahā Vākya* of *Yajur Vēdhā* occurs in '*Purushavidha Brāhmaṇam*' in the first chapter of *Bṛuhadāraṇyaka* Upanishad. Here also after saying 'whichever *Dēvās*, Rishis and humans had experienced what is said in this *Mahā Vākya* became *Brahmam* themselves particular mention has been made only of *Vāmadēvar* by name. Therefore it can be assumed that *Īśwarā* Himself became guru and gave *upadēsa* to *Vāmadēvar*, the *jnāni* into his *anthahkarṇa* and there is room for saying that it is only the *sanyāsis* who are fit to be the recipients of this *Upadēsa*.

The *Mahā Vākya* of *Atharva Vēdhā* occurs in *Mandūkyōpanishad*. In another Upanishad it is said that Rama gave

Upadēsam to Hanuman that this one Upanishad is enough for a Mumukshu who is keen about *mōksham* to attain *mōksham* (that Upanishad is called '*Mukthikōpanishad*'). Therefore it can be said that the *Mahā Vākya* occurring in Atharva *Vēdhā* also is to be given as *Upadēsa* only to a *sanyāsi*.

Now the question about the *Mahā Vākya* in *Sāma Vēdhā*. Those who raise objection do so on the strength of this only. Of the four *Mahā Vākya*s this is the only one which is mentioned as having been given as *upadēsa* by a guru directly to a *śishyā*. That is why it has been accorded a special place. That *śishyā* is not a *sanyāsi* but a bachelor in his youth. The objection is based on this. It is asked 'How can it be said that a *upadēsam* which was originally given to a *brahmachāri* of twenty four years can be given only to a *sanyāsi*?'.

The point is not one of being young or old. One should have attained ripeness in *jñāna*. Usually such ripeness will be attained only by one who has gone through the ups and downs of life and has performed *Karma Yōgam* well. *Āchāryā* stated as a general rule that *Mahā Vākya Upadēsam* is to be given at the time of giving *sanyāsa āśramam*. There is for example a rule that only one who has attained a certain age can sit for the S.S.C. examination. Simply because there are some prodigies who excel even a graduate or post-graduate at the age of seven can it be said that the general rule is wrong? Every rule has its exceptions and therefore exemption is given to such a prodigy in regard to the age for taking the examination. In the same manner that boy of *Sāma Vēdhā* - *Swēthakēthu* - is an exception to the rule that only a *sanyāsi* is entitled to *Brahma Vidhyā*. After having learnt from the father and then from the guru for twelve years he becomes so learned as to feel proud that no one can equal him. It is when the pride of such people is put down, humility comes all of a sudden and the attitude of surrender also sets in. When a highly intellectual person realizes that all his intellect and intelligence is of no use, understands the greatness of experience and feels defeated, he dedicates himself

wholly for it. No one else can do like that. The father of the *Sāma Vēdhā* boy himself put down the boy's pride, raised him to this high attitude and it was in that stage he gave him the *upadēsam* of *Mahā Vākya*m. Therefore, it is not correct to quote that as a precedent and say that the *upadēsam* of the *Mahā Vākya* can be given to all people.

A general rule for the practice of spiritual learning (*āthma vidhyā*) - the rule given in *Brahma Sūthram* - is that it is only for the celibates (*Oordhvarēthas*). They are those who do not waste even a bit of their energy in the enjoyment of the senses but who go on strengthening it for Self-elevation (*āthmābivrudhdi*).

One who has destroyed *kāmam* like that will become a *sanyāsi* only. If one is pure like fire even at a young age and shines without *kāmam* raising its head at all, he can be given *sanyāsam* and *dikshai* in the *vidhyā* of non-difference between *jīvā* and *Brahmam*. *Āchāryā* himself became *sanyāsi* at the age of eight. He had introduced the tradition of giving *dikshai* to young *brahmachāris* and keeping them as *Swāmīs* in the mutts of his tradition. At a place called *Sribali* a father brought his boy who was like an inert object (*jadam*) to *Āchāryā* and requested him to cure the boy of his mental illness. But *Āchāryā* could see the ripeness of *jñāna* inside what looked like mental illness. He gave the boy *sanyāsam* and kept him with him. It is that boy who became *Ḥasthāmalakar* - one of the four main *śishyās*. Later a boy of seven years who was even younger than *Swēthakēthu*, who was highly intelligent entered into a debate with *Āchāryā* himself. He got defeated. He became very humble and immediately developed the attitude of surrender and fell at the feet of *Āchāryā*. *Āchāryā* became very happy, gave the child *sanyāsam* and gave the name *Sarvajñāthmar*. I am saying this to make the point that *Āchāryā* who made rules applicable to all people did not hesitate to relax them in the case of some rare ones who were above the law. Although the *Sāma Vēdhā* boy was a *brahmachāri* of twenty four

years because he was ripe in *jnāna* his father (rishi) gave him *Upadēsam*.

It is not correct to point to some who are exceptions and say that the rule should be removed. If Vidhura's birth is considered he was not fit for *jnāna* according to *sāsthās*. Yet, he was a *jnāni*. *Dharmavyādhār* was running a butcher's shop. Yet he was a *jnāni*. In his *Sūthra Bāshyam Āchāryā* has referred to these people as examples and says that they attained *jnāna* due to the greatness of their *samskāras* of previous birth. When ripeness had been attained in the previous birth and a little bad *karmā* had remained due to which there was rebirth the state of ripeness of the previous birth surfaces itself and takes one to the advanced spiritual state. Such spiritual strength due to the *samskāras* of previous birth will be there only rarely for some people. A general rule cannot be made keeping them as the yardstick.

The general rule for people of the normal run whose *samskāras* are not adequate is *Karma Yōgam*. They will find it difficult to do even that. When that is so, it is no use placing unbearable burden on them by prescribing for them the *Jnāna Yōgā* for which destruction of the mind and indriyas is necessary.

That is why the last stage in the *Sāadhanā* is prescribed for the one who is in the fourth *āśrama* and who has given up all *karmās* and has dedicated himself to '*jnāna vichāram*'. It is only when all activities concerned with home, food etc are given up and all attachments are shaken off and one sits for doing '*āthma vichāram*' as whole time activity as a *sanyāsi* it will be possible to give up thoughts gradually. Although, upto a stage, good actions, *swadharmā* are necessary to clear the dirt of old bad *karmās*, later that itself becomes a dirt and gets hold of the mind without allowing it to dissolve itself in the peace of the thoughtless state. We use some material to clean a vessel. Then we have to clean that material also. Then only the vessel becomes bright. Similarly, only

when all the *karmās* go, the *anthahkaraṇa* will become clear and bright. For this to happen there should be freedom from external activities as the first thing. That is *sanyāsam*. Once a *sanyāsi*, the mental activities should be stopped and he should become a *mukthā*. Without the disturbance to peace due to activity he should get dissolved in the ocean of bliss and be in the state of *Brahmam*. That is a peaceful state which will not change. If it is possible for us who are always in an agitated state to attain that state, is it not our duty to try for it? Otherwise, whatever might be our scholarship, whatever be our status or our fame in any field, we will end up only as being foolish.

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WHY SHOULD WHAT IS APPROPRIATE TO A SANYĀSI BE PRESCRIBED FOR EVERY ONE?

A question may arise in your mind : 'What does it mean to say that people are fools without understanding the reality? If someone speaks without understanding the actuality is he correct? If it is permanent peace one would certainly desire to have it. But if it is said that for taking the necessary steps in the third stage to attain it one should take to *sanyāsam* it is not practicable. We are not ready for it. If one is told that to attain that peace, 'give up all relationship, give up your job, go away from home' there will be the fear about what would happen then, with the result that even the existing peace will be lost. If, in the state in which we are with all sorts of likes and dislikes we take to *sanyāsam*, will it be possible to conduct ourselves according to that state even to a small extent? Will we not end up doing wrong things? When being in that *āśramam* if we indulge in such wrong doings, will it not be great sin? Unless we are willing to deceive ourselves is there room for thinking that we can take to *sanyāsam* and live in accordance with that *āśrama*? The one who gives this advice will not also be so foolish as to think that all of us can become *sanyāsis* and engage in

āthma vichāram all the time! (Periyava laughs). Why then does he lecture to us like this?' In other words it may appear why should something which should be told to one who thinks of taking to *sanyāsam* and has the ripeness for it be told to all people?

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TWO DIFFERENT PATHS FOR TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEOPLE

If such thoughts arise it would be justified. However much *jnānōpadēsam* is given, conferences are held on Adhvaitha, books are published and distributed free or at a cheap price, crowds will gather, there will be demand for books but those who will take to the practice of Adhvaitham will be rare. *Bhagawān* Himself has said 'only one in a thousand will engage himself in practice; out of those very few, just one, will do the practice intensely and attain siddhi (*Gītā* VII-3). The *māyā* drama of the world takes place like that! Excepting those rare persons who have the strength of the samskara of previous births, others are unable to get freed from the pulls of the mind and the itch to indulge in activities and are not able to even think seriously about getting released.

That is why *Bhagawān* has made a clear demarcation between such people who can only do *karmā* and those rare people who are entitled to *jnāna mārgā* and has given *Upadēsam* in *Gītā*. Not only that; he says that he did not make this division but long before him such divisions had been made. He says '*purā prōktha*'. *Pūrā* means in the olden times. It is the '*purā*' which is part of the word '*Purāṇam*'. It is the division that has been made in the *Vēdhā* itself which he refers to as '*purā prōktha*'. *Prōktha* means what has been said clearly. Since *Īswarā* has given this *Upadēsam* through the *Vēdhās* *Bhagawān* says 'It was said like this by me in olden times - '*purā prōktha māyā*' he says. The two paths are :

Jnānayōgēna sāṅkyānām karmāyōgēna yōginām

There are two *mārgās* (path) - *Jñāna Yōgam* and *Karma Yōgam*.

Jñāna Yōgam is the *Adhvaitha Sāadhanā* which is our topic. That is only for the very few who have the highest *samskāras*. *Bhagawān* calls them *Sāṅkyās*. Many meanings are given to this word. One thing funny occurs to me. Sankya means number. Population is called Jana Sankya. Therefore why should we not take it that *Sāṅkyās* means those whose number is so small that they can be easily counted! What is for them and only for them is *Adhvaitha Sāadhanā* which is *Jñāna Yōgam*. For all others it is *Karma Yōgam*.

It is usual to refer to *karmā* as *Pravruthi* and *Jñāna* as *Nivruthi*. Manu who has clearly classified both - Manu who gave the foremost *sāsthrās* which tell us the *dharmās* - says 'Pravruthamcha nivrutham cha dwivitham karma vaidhikam'. What *Brahma Sūthra* says : '*Vibhāgaḥ sathavath*' is the same as what *Bhagawān* and Manu have said, namely, that there are two different paths - *karmā* and *jñāna* - for the two different types of people with two different types of mental evolvement and *samskāras*. What has been said is just as a hundred rupees are divided into two fifties and is given to two different persons the path that is meant for the *āthmā* has been divided into two and given to two different types of people. This comes in *Brahma Sūthram* after three-fourths of it. The very first *Sūthra* announces this;

Athāthō Brahma Jijnāsā

is that *Sūthram*. *Atha atha Brahma Jijnāsā*. 'then after this let us enquire into Brahman' is the meaning. In the very beginning it is said 'then after this'. *Āchāryā* has clarified 'after what'. He has explained it thus : After attaining *siddhi* in the first stage namely that of *karmā mārgā*, then completing the *Sāadhanā* in the second stage and then receiving *sanyāsam* and the *upadēsam* of *Mahā*

Vākya from a guru one dedicates oneself wholly to matters concerning the *ātmā*. It is when this last stage comes one can commence the enquiry into Brahman.

All those who are gathered here with the exception of one or two are fit only for *Karma Yōgam*. They are those who cannot give up *karmā*. *Karma yōgā* says, 'All right. Keep doing *karmā* but without fixing your mind on the fruits of your action and the desire for the fruits do your duty, your *swadharmā*; leave the question of fruits to *Īśwarā* who is the *phaladhātā*'.

It is only after the mind becomes cleansed through such *nishkāmya* (without desire) *karmā* one becomes fit for *Jnāna Yōgam*. In his *bāshyam* on *Gītā*, *Āchāryā* has made this clear. Although these days those like Tilak and Gandhi say that *Karma Yōgā* is itself the direct *Sādhanā*, *Āchāryā* has shown that it is not so. We are not concerned with that now. But since I have touched on this aspect I shall make it clear.

In the last chapter of *Gītā* (Sloka 46) it is said that 'a person attains *siddhi* by doing the *karmā* according to his *swadharmā* as an offering to *Īśwarā*:

Swakarmaṇā tham abhyarchya siddhim vindhathi mānavah
(Xviii-46)

Those who say that *Karma Yōgam* is the direct *Sādhanā* for *mōksham* do so by understanding the *siddhi* mentioned here as 'mōksha *siddhi*. But *Āchāryā* has explained it thus : 'the *siddhi* mentioned here is the *siddhi* of the qualification for taking to *Jnāna Yōgā*; that is the *siddhi* one gets as the final fruit of *Karma Yōgā*. He who has till now given up only the fruits of *karmā* will become qualified to henceforth give up *karmā* itself, become a *sanyāsi*, commence *Jnāna Yōgam* and engage himself in spiritual enquiry all the time.' From his strong arguments based on different statements it is confirmed that he is correct. *Āchāryā* has also said

that the glorification of *Karma Yōgam* here and there in the *Gītā* is only 'arthavādhām'. 'Arthavādhām' is meant to encourage and enthruse us to follow a particular path by glorifying it. When a child refuses to read, we tell the child 'only if you read you can become a *rājā*'. This is *arthavādhām*. It is done with the best of intentions and with a good objective in view. *Bhagawān* has glorified *Karma Yōgam* to create enthusiasm in the person who may think '*Jnāna* is the path to attain *mōksham*. But I am not fit for it and I have to struggle with this *Karma Yōgam*'. He is told 'Do not under estimate *Karma Yōgam*. This *Karma Yōgam* is this, that and everything and will give such and such fruits.' But it is only when talking of the *jnāni*, *Bhagawān* says '*Jnānī thvāthmaiva mē matham*' (Ch.VII.18). It is my firm conclusion that *jnāni* is I myself.' He says '*madhbhavāmagathāh*' - *jnāni* had attained my qualities (IV.10).

A clear demarcation has been made in *Bhagawān*'s own words that *Jnāna Yōgam* is for the *sāṅkyās* and *Karma Yōgā* is for *Yōgis*.

Bhagawān refers to those who are entitled only to *Karma Yōgam* as 'yōgi'. We think of a *yōgi* as one who sits in the high state, controlling breath and mind. But why does *Bhagawān* refer like this to one who lacks the ripeness to go on the path of *jnāna* but is following a good path even in *Karma Yōgam*? I think of a novel explanation for this. The direct meaning of *yōgam* is 'joining' or 'coming together'. For joining there should be two things minimum. There may be more than that. When there is only one thing there is no scope for 'joining'. It is just itself. Looked at from this point of view *yōgi* is 'Dwaithi' who is attached to something; in other words he is one who remains messed up in the illusory world of duality. We get the meaning that he is not an *Adhvaithi* who can be on his own. (*Periyavā* laughs). I have said this in good humour. Scholars and those who are knowledgeable should not take it amiss.

Most people like us have attachment to *karmā*. (Karmasangi). The maximum that we can do is to perform action without attachment to its fruits. Even that is very difficult. All our activities are aimed at securing some fruit or the other. When that is so, performing action without the thought of its fruits is of course very difficult. What is the use of telling 'Go one step above (that one step is like the top storey.) Give up all *karmā* and keep meditating all the time? By making the demarcation of paths for the *Sāṅkyās* and the *karmayōgis Bhagawān* seems to tell the *karmayōgi* 'you need not do anything connected with *āthmā*. You stop with doing *karmā* as a *yōgā*. Let purity of mind due to that *yōgā* come in its own time. It is enough if you take to *Jñāna Yōgā* after that.' When a person is going on a particular path and is not steady on that path itself what is the use of his knowing about another path?

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THE REASON WHY IT IS BEING TOLD TO ALL

What we have to do is to give up the desire for the fruits of our action. We have to try to act in that manner. That itself is very difficult. If we are to do the action (*swadharmā karmā*) without thinking of the fruits but only to discharge the old *karmā* and attain purity of mind through that it is not easy. Even to do this - not as a way to do *nidhiyāsanam* in *jñāna mārḡā* - to keep on reducing the desire for fruits in *karma yōgā* itself we have to know several philosophical truths and become clear about them. We have to do several practices. But if we see at the end, all these are the same steps laid down in *jñāna mārḡā* that is Adhvaitha *sāadhanā*. Several steps have been indicated - taking *sanyāsam* and doing *Śravaṇam*, *mananam* and *nidhiyāsanam*. They are also required for practicing *karma yōgā* properly and making progress in it. But one would not go deep into them.

In the history book of the fourth standard everything starting from Mohenjadhro, the Vedhic period, the period of Buddha, Mauryas, Turks, Guptas, the English etc are given. The one who reads Indian history in the M.A. class also has to read these things. But there is a lot of difference between the two. In the same manner, what is taught to those of *jnāna mārḡā* is also necessary for those of the *karma mārḡā*.

It may not be possible for us to go to Switzerland and do ice-skating, see beautiful mountain sceneries etc. But when we see them in colour photos we get the joy of having experienced them there itself. Also, seeing the colour photo creates the desire in us to go there and prompts us to make efforts in that direction. We may or may not go to Switzerland. By going there we are not going to get permanent happiness. But to go to the spiritual world (*āthma lōkam*) which gives permanent bliss everyone must make efforts. We may not know when we may reach there. But we have to go. That is the fruit of having taken this birth – the great fruit of eliminating future births. That is why a little of the path for it is being told now to create interest in it just as showing a scenery in a photo.

There is another reason also. Although majority of people may not be fit for Adhvaitha *sāadhanā* now itself, not all of them may be at the lower stage. There may be several people here itself who have gained purity of mind to some extent, *vivēkam* and *vairāgyam* and the purity of thought, speech and action (*Thrikaraṇa suddhi*). If they know the steps of *sāadhanā* it may make them think 'we can make some more efforts, improve ourselves and go on that path'. By merely mentioning about 'a path' it helps in making them curious 'what is that path'? Let us just know it' and starting from this it will turn them to think 'why not we try to go on that path?' *Manthrās* and practices like kundalini which will end in disaster even if there is a slight mistake in their practice have to be kept secret and not told to all people.

Jnāna Yōgā is not like that. Therefore talking about it to all people is no great mistake.

Here, one important thing needs to be told. *Āchāryā* has prescribed *sanyāsa āsramam* only for the one who takes up *jnāna mārḡā* as a *sādhana* but he is of the view that even those who are not qualified for *Jnāna yōgam* (although they should not engage in its *sādhana*) may learn matters concerning the soul and engage themselves in the thought of the Self.

He has written a short work of *upadēsam* - *Bāla Bodha Sangraham*. Sangraham means 'brief'. The very name *Bāla Bodham* indicates that it is meant for children. In the olden days even a boy of eight years would have had his upanayanam done. Then till his eleventh or twelfth year when he is in *gurukulavāsam*, the *brahmachāri* can be considered a child. The brief *upadēsam* that *Āchāryā* gives to such children is *Bāla Bodha Sangraham*. *Āchāryā* gives *upadēsam* in the manner of the child asking questions and the guru giving replies. The *upadēsam* is the highest philosophy - Adhvaitha *upadēsam*! He gives all the important points of Adhvaitha *vidhyā* briefly in that *Upadēsam*. He has given the steps for Adhvaitha *sādhana*. Do we not see from this that *Āchāryā* did not think that matters regarding Adhvaitha should be told only to the one who has become ripe and attained the qualifications and is in a position to undertake practice in *jnāna mārḡā*? Do we not see that it is his view that there should be no one who does not know the Adhvaitha philosophy even as an outline. One may take to his practice in his own time; but it appears that *Āchāryā* was of the view that all people must know the method of doing the *sādhana*.

The moment we say *Āchāryā* all of us think of Adhvaitha. But his greatness is that he has not prescribed it for all simply because he has beautifully codified and founded the Adhvaitha *siddhānthā*. He did not prescribe it for everyone for practicing it

immediately. He has understood human nature and with great sympathy he has kept *karmā* for one section of people and has prescribed Adhvaitha only for others.

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ABOUT BHAKTHIYŌGAM

One important thing needs to be told. It may be asked 'Why did *Āchāryā* or Krishna *Paramāthmā* before him classify people as those for *karmayōgam* and those for *jnānayōgam* and why did they not have the third classification, *Bhakthiyōgam*'? The answer is : Bhakthi is very necessary both for the *karmayōgi* and *jnānayōgi*; It is because both have to practice bhakthi as part of their respective *yōgās*, Bhakthi has not been classified separately. If the *karmayōgi* has to practice bhakthi at one level the *jnānayōgi* also has to do it at another level. I have said earlier that there are two kinds of *śraddhā* - one at the lower level and one at the higher level. Consistent with our speaking of 'bhakthi - *śraddhā*' there are two levels in bhakthi also. It is like there being two levels - higher and lower - in typewriting and shorthand! The person of *karmayōga* has to practice bhakthi for him to remember that there is *Īśwarā* who is watching the *karmā* and will award punishment. In order to progress at that level and to train the mind to remain concentrated through love, bhakthi should be practiced. With some more practice - it is still lower level and not higher - the bhakthi with which the fruits of action are offered to *Īśwarā* has to be nurtured. The one who has gone still higher and does *jnānayōgam* has to practice bhakthi in the thought that the *āthmā*, the Brahman to experience which he is doing *Sāadhanā* is itself *Īśwarā* in *Sagurā* who gave him the taste for Adhvaitha and enabled him to go on that path and in the end it is by His grace he should attain final siddhi.

Those who have gone still higher - who do not know the higher, lower or any such thing - the Siddha Purushas who have

attained the experience will also practice bhakthi. One of the great siddhas namely *Śukāchāryā* says that no reason can be given for practicing bhakthi in that manner.

Therefore since bhakthi is there at all levels in *karmā* and *jñāna* it has not been mentioned separately.

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BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF ADHVAITHA FOR ALL

Although *Āchāryā* prescribed the Adhvaitha *sādhana* only for those who take to the path of *jñāna* he was of the view that all people - including those following the path of *karmā* - should have knowledge of Adhvaitha *sāsthrā*. I started talking about Adhvaitha because we who are keeping *Āchāryā*'s name have a duty to tell all people about the *sādhana* for attaining the state of Adhvaitha which he has founded as a *siddhāntā*. Normally, I do not talk on these subjects. Everywhere there is talk of Adhvaitha. It is mere talk all over. Therefore all people talk on that but no one takes it up for *anushtānam*. But as if all people have become Adhvaithis wrong ideas of equality, contrary to *sāsthrā* are spreading. I do not talk of this in the thought 'let us not also increase this love of the ordinary people for this kind of Adhvaitha'. But recently *Āchārya Jayanthi* was celebrated and a big Vidhvath sadhas also was conducted. Some people came to me and requested 'Will you not tell us about Adhvaitha?' Therefore in order to tell people how much discipline is involved in Adhvaitha *sādhana*, for whom it is meant etc I thought that I, having the name of the Adhvaitha Guru should speak. Since those who requested me are also here I did not want to postpone it and started talking on it.

I have mentioned about the small book *Bāla Bodham* which *Āchāryā* has written. There is another one, *Prasnōthra Rathnamālā* meant for the general public. This is also in the form of questions and answers and has in view the average householder. (*Prasnam* is

question. Uththaram is reply. Several of these have been put together like a *rāgamālikā*). In this there is a question; ko hathah - who is the one who is alive but is as good as dead? The reply is : *kriyā brashtah* - one who does not do the *karmā* meant for him and keeps himself away from it. *Āchāryā* who has said in *Vivēka Chūdāmaṇī* and other works of *jnāna* that 'only the one who after giving up all *karmānushtānā* takes to *sanyāsam* and engages himself in '*āthma vichārā*' has gained the fruits of having taken birth and the rest are those who have committed suicide; that is they are as good as dead though living'. But here he says that *karmā* is what man has to do and that if he does not do it he is as good as dead though living. From this it is seen that this work has been written keeping the average person in view.

To the question 'By what a person will be free from sorrow?' He gives the answer 'By a wife who is obedient'. Then the question 'Mithram kim?' - who is one's true friend? And the answer is 'Bhāryā' - It is the wife. From these it is clear that his *upadēsa* is meant for the householders. Even in such books *Āchāryā* has not failed to speak about matters relating to spirituality and metaphysics. (*adhyāthma*). He has done it in a fine manner. When he speaks of the *dharmā* applicable to a *jnāni* and his state he would indicate indirectly, by mentioning something particularly characteristic of a *jnāni*, 'this is not for you. This does not mean you should be like this now itself. It is appropriate to the one who has embarked on *āthma sādhanā*'. Where the *upadēsa* is meant for all people he would not have mentioned any particular characteristic but merely given *upadēsam*. An example will make this clear.

At the beginning he speaks about the guru. Then the very first question is '*Dwaritham kim karthavyam vidhushām?*' - What is it that those who know have to do urgently? The characteristic given here is 'those who know' - meaning a *vidwan*. The plural form of this is '*vidwāmsah*'. Its sixth declension is '*vidhushām*'.

The question is 'what is the urgent task of those who know?' Here there is no reference to the common people. The reply is '*samsāra santhathi chēthah*' - to end the long story of *samsārā* - meaning not to be born repeatedly but to attain *mōksham*. From this it is clear that *Āchāryā* wanted to remind the common man also in the beginning itself about *mōksha*. But since he need not have to be in a hurry for it he makes a distinction that it is the vidwan who knows who has to be in a hurry.

In another place there is the question '*kasmāth udhvēga syāth?*' - seeing which, one should shiver? Udhvegam is to shiver, 'To be afraid of'. These days people use the word 'udvegam' in the sense of additional speed or speed resulting from a push. That is wrong. The reply is '*samsāra arāṇyathah sudhiyah*'. It is the forest of *samsāra* of which one should shiver with fear. Even when he says this he makes it clear that such a fear will not be experienced by all people by using the word 'sudhiyah'. Sudhiyah means those who have gained intelligence of a high order. What is understood is that only those who are fit to gain the highest *jñāna* can think of *samsārā* as a terrible forest and who are afraid of it can get released from it and take *sanyāsam*. But he has added such a question and answered so that even the common man may know that the person of great intelligence will do like that.

Āchāryā not only thought that average people - like us - should know what the vidwān would do and that highly intelligent person would be afraid of the forest of *samsārā*; he has also said something that all of us have to do in respect of *samsārā*. He has said it in an interesting manner.

The question is '*Kim samsārē sāram?*' What is it that is like essence in *samsāram*? The answer is '*Bahuśōpi vichinthyamānam idham ēva*'. - constantly thinking of this.

'This means 'which'?

‘You ask the question now. What is it that is like essence in *samsāra*? Think of it and go on asking that question repeatedly. The very fruit of having taken this birth is to keep questioning whether there is any use having taken this birth. This is what has been said by ‘*Idham ēva bahusōpi*’.

If we keep on enquiring like this we will know that there is no ‘saram’ in ‘*samsāram*’. Eagerness will develop to know what is ‘saram’, namely, the *Ātmā*. When living in *samsāra* we were thinking that with that life has attained fullness. It is this question which has opened our eyes and saved us. Therefore we will know if there is any saram in *samsāram* it is this question only.

The meaning of the *ślōkā* is that there should always be the thought about the *Ātmā* to some extent. Since no particular characteristic like vidwan or *sudhī* is mentioned here, it means that this *Upadēsam* is for all people. It is *Āchāryā*’s view that even the common man who will be as good as dead if he gives up his *karmā* should now and then think of release from *samsārā*.

Further on, *Āchāryā* asks the question ‘What is it that is to be thought of day and night?’ - *Kā aharnīsam anuchinthyā?* - the reply is ‘*samsāra asāradhā*’ - that *samsāram* is without any *sāram*.

In his *Sōpāna Panchakam* which *Āchāryā* gave as his last *Upadēsam* to his *śishyās* when he had decided to end his journey on this earth (*Sōpānam* means a row of steps. It is also called *Upadēsa Panchakam*) he has given direction for ordinary people like us about where to start from and upto the highest stage in which one attains Brahman. It begins with ‘*Vēdhō nithyam adhiyathām thathudhitham karmaswanushtīyathām*’ - ‘do adhyayana of *Vēdhā* daily and observe all the *karmās* stipulated in it’.

Thus it is seen that this *upadēsa* is for one who goes in the *karmā mārgā* but in this itself he says ‘*āthmēchaiyai*’ - ‘develop the keen desire for matters connected with *āthmā*’ - leave the home;

receive the *Upadēsam* of *Vēdhā Mahā Vākyā* from a guru etc and ends with saying 'be one with the Brahman'. From this it is seen that it is *Āchāryā's* view that even though one is fit only for *karmā* now, he must know all about *jnānayōgam*.

From all this it is confirmed that although *Āchāryā* has separated in the manner of *Bhagawān* the *Sāṅkyās* and the *Yōgis* he was of the view that even those majority of people who are fit only for *karmā* must have basic knowledge of *jnāna*. *Bhagawān* also has thought like this. He considered Arjuna fit for *karmayōgam* only. Everyone knows '*Karmaṇ ēva adhikārasthē*' which he told Arjuna. He pulled back Arjuna who refused to fight and was ready to run away as a *sanyāsī*, involved him in *karmā* and commanded him to fight. But in the *Gītā* which he gave Arjuna as *upadēsam* he did not confine himself to *karmayōgam* but spoke elaborately about *jnānayōgam* also. The beginning itself is in *Sāṅkyayōgam* which is very abstract.

Experts in music analyse which *swarās* are to be sung in which *rāga*, do *nyāsam* and *vinyāsam* etc. The child which just begins to learn music has to learn the same *swarās* namely Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, dha, Ni. They are told just to say the swaras without any modulation. In that stage what is required is to maintain the '*sruthi*'. Beginning with this, one goes into the subtleties of the *swarās*, does *nyāsam* and *vinyāsam* etc. In the same manner, in our life the last is *sanyāsam*. Just as the swaras are learnt by the beginner in music all the subtle truths and practices of the *sanyāsa* stage have to be known by all people.

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DISCRIMINATION OF THE PERMANENT AND THE EPHEMERAL

I have said that like 'sa' at the start of music lesson, in spiritual practice the *Sādhana Chathushtayam* is the first. In that the first is '*Nithyānithya vasthu vivēkam*'.

The first stage is to perform *karmās* which have been assigned by *sāsthrās* as an offering to *Īswarā*, practicing bhakthi to *Īswarā*, having the *anthahkaranā* purified by these and gaining the power to remain steady in one thing. This first stage is not the first stage of *jnānayōgam*. It is the first stage in one's spiritual transformation. This belongs to *karmayōgam*. What is commenced next is the first stage of *jnānayōgam*. What is indicated as the first in that is 'Nithyānithya vasthu vivēkam'.

If one desires to engage oneself in the enquiry of Self what are the basic requirements? It is the knowledge that it is the *āthmā* only which is permanent and all else is impermanent. In the absence of such knowledge one will continue to suffer in this ephemeral world. What is very necessary is the thought and the faith 'whatever gives us a lot of pleasure, status, fame etc in this world are all impermanent; none of these will give permanent good. It is only the *āthmā* which is permanent which will give permanent good'. Several things may drag the mind frequently. At all such times one has to think with a sense of discrimination : 'Just because this appears to give us joy can we enter into it? Is it an unmixed joy? Even if it is unmixed joy, will it be permanent? Once we enter into it, will not the taste of it enter the mind and make it try again and again for the same and thus create a bondage? If a thing is not useful to cleanse the mind and attain peace can we enter into it?' Only with such discriminating analysis we can go the spiritual way which is the path for reaching the permanent state. This kind of rational discrimination is 'vivēkam'.

We very well know about things which are not permanent. Whatever we know well are all impermanent! Although the permanent thing transcends the mind and speech the '*āthma sāsthrās*' give us an idea of the same in a subtle way. From this we should get the basic knowledge of the *āthmā* which is the permanent thing. With constant thought of the *āthmā* which gives

permanent good and peace we should discard the impermanent things which give us only temporary good and peace.

In this beginning stage it is not necessary that such things should be discarded totally. There are several things which, though not permanent like the *āthmā*, are capable of being helpful in reaching us to that permanent thing. There are many like *āthma sāsthrās*, *upadēśam* of great men on such *sāsthrās*, holy places which induce the pure attitude, *purāṇās*, *sthōthrās* etc. These too are not *āthmā*. *Āthma sākshāthkāram* will materialize only when all these get decimated. What is permanent experience is to remain as the *āthmā* without any thought or work and nothing else. Even if *Swāmi* appears before us and gives *dharsan* or *Ambāl* keeps us on Her lap and tends us they too are not permanent experience like the experience of Self. But these are capable of taking us near it. There are also several things which appear to be good for the time being but which take us far away from the *āthmā*. Out of these, what is really good should be selected through *vivēkam* and the way to reach the permanent thing should be found - the way *Yamadharma*rājā told *Swēthakēthu*. 'I have attained what is permanent through those things which are impermanent.'

The real practitioner of *jnāna mārḡā* would have completely escaped from the sensual pleasures, the pleasure of just idling etc which are harmful to spiritual evolution. But we have to begin with these and sort out the permanent and impermanent with *vivēkam* and make a choice. There are several things like cinema, eating, wanting to take coffee frequently, listening to cricket commentary, reading useless books, seriously discussing politics etc which attract us powerfully. We should have the alertness to judge whether any of these will be useful for spiritual achievement. The mind will somehow find justification to do what it wants. The power of *vivēkam* should not give room to it and we should be strict in our judgement.

What has been said now is for the ordinary people who are in the majority. Even those who have attained ripeness through *āthma sādhanā* and got freed from many of the attractions of the world may be subject to the pulls of some small sensual pleasures. Certain things which are good for us and are helpful in following the spiritual path may not be necessary for them. They have to take note of them and reject them. What is required is only *āthma sākshāthkāram*. They must be serious that : 'Only *āthmā* is required. Rest are useless and should be discarded'.

'*Nithyānithya vasthu vivēkam*' is also called '*athmānāthma vasthu vivēkam*' or '*vivēchanam*'. *Vivēchanam* also means *vivēkam* - the ability to distinguish between the good and the bad. Making this distinction is the only *vivēkam* in *adhvaitha sāsthram*. There is the practice of calling '*Vivēka Chūdāmaṇi*' as *athmānāthma Chūdāmaṇi*. In this, after the first *ślōkā* which is in the nature of a prayer (*Mangalā Charaṇam*) in the first *ślōkā* of the text when speaking of the *Sādhanā mārgam* the observance of *Vaidhika Dharmā* and knowledge of *Vēdhā* which are common to all paths are mentioned and then *athmānāthma vivēkam* which is only for those of *jñāna mārgā* is mentioned and then it ends with *Swānubhūthi* and *Mukthi*, thus giving importance to this (*Nithyānithya vasthu vivēkam*). Later in the same book *Āchāryā* has defined the *vivēka* of deciding what is permanent what is impermanent in the highest level.

Brahma sathyam jagan-mithyēth-ēvam rūpō vinischayah
So (a)yam nithyānithya vasthu-vivēkah samudhāhruthah
(Vivēka Chūdāmaṇi - Ślōkā 20)

The meaning is 'Brahmam alone is real (sathyam), Jagath though appears to be real is unreal (mithya) and this discrimination between the real and unreal is called *vivēkam*'. *Samudhāhruthah* means 'It has been proclaimed'. By whom or in which is it proclaimed? It is in the *Vēdhās*. *Vēdhās* alone have the authority to

proclaim the truth. Since *Āchāryā* follows only the *Vedhās* he has omitted reference to it thinking that we all understand it to be so.

In Upanishads a lot is said about this. The very purpose of Upanishads is to join the *jīvās* who are caught in the ephemeral world with the permanent thing (*Nithya vasthu*). In *Katōpanishad* and *Chāndōgyōpanishad* there are stories of those starting from the young *Nachikēthas* to Indra who understood the impermanent things as impermanent and found the permanent truth. The young *Nachikēthas* rejected all the gifts that Yamah offered to him saying 'These are impermanent. All these will return to you one day' and requested for and received the *Upadēsam* on '*Āthma Thathvam*' which is permanent. '*Nithyō anithyānām*' - *Yamā* described *āthmā* as the only permanent thing of all that is impermanent and gives the *upadēsam* that permanent peace can be attained only by those who realize it. The *upadēsa* also says that all wealth is impermanent, the permanent thing cannot be attained through any of these impermanent things. In the *Chāndōgya* story, *Vīrochanā* the king of *asurās* and Indra the *Dēvarājā* make enquiry into what is *āthmā*. The *asurā* concludes that the body is the *āthmā*. This is '*asurā vēdāntham*'! Indra discards step by step the experiences of the different states, namely, the waking, dreaming and deep sleep as *asathyam* and gets to know the real *āthmā*. His discarding like this is '*Nithyānithya vasthu vivēkam*' only. In *Thaithirīyam* it is said that Brughu started thinking that everything is *Brahmam* beginning with *Annamaya Kōsam* (the sheath of food) and finally attained the *jñāna* that the *āthmā* which is the support of the *Ānandamaya Kōsam* is the *Brahmam*. Putting this in another way it can be said that by *vivēkam* he rejected all the five kosas as impermanent and learnt that the *āthmā* is the permanent thing.

'*Nēthi nēthi*' - '*Brahmam* is not like this; not like this; it is not something that can be held; it does not get hold of another thing; it is not bound; it does not suffer; it does not perish' - this is

what is said in *Bṛuhadāraṇyakam*. Things of the world are the opposite of this. Therefore making the distinction by '*nēthi nēthi*' means understanding the impermanent things for what they are and rejecting them and getting hold of the only thing that remains namely the *āthmā*. '*Anyāth artham*' - 'rest all perish'.

In *Bhagavadh Gītā* at the very commencement of *Upadēsam Bhagawān* tells Arjuna '*Āthmā* is the only thing that is permanent'. The body which you do not want to kill is impermanent; all the experiences of the body come and go - '*Āgamāpāyinah anithya*' (II-14). He further says 'It is only *āthmā* which is permanent, imperishable and immeasurāble : '*Nithyasyōkthāh sarīrīṇah anāśinō (a)pramēyasya*' - (II.18). Again he says '*Anithyam asukam lōkam imam prāpya bhajasva mām*' (IX-33). 'You have taken birth in this impermanent world of sorrow. Worship me for your redemption. 'Me' means 'who'? He is *Brahma Swarūpam*, *Āthmā Swarūpam*.

'*Ahamāthmā gudākēsā sarvabhuthāśaya sthithah* (X-20).' (I am seated as the *āthmā* in the hearts of all beings) he says. Therefore worshipping Him means the enquiry into Self, the *āthmā*. The import of what he said is 'Everything in the world is impermanent. Hold on to the *āthmā* which is permanent'. The thirteenth chapter of *Gītā* is called '*Kshēthra Kshēthrajna Vibhāga Yōgam*'. It is the *Yōgā* which distinguishes the body (*Kshēthra*) from *Kshēthrajna*, the *āthmā* which is of the form of intelligence inside it. When the Lord defines *Kshēthra* as the five elements, indriyas, things after which the indriyas go, desire, enmity, enjoyment, sorrow, it appears that he has separated the impermanent things and shown them. Similarly, he refers to the permanent thing as *Kshēthrajna*. This is seen from his saying 'It shines, spread over all the world, what is inside, what is outside, what moves and what is motionless, what is far and what is near'. Again He says that 'One who has known the distinction between *Prakruthi* and *Purusha* has no rebirth. That is, he attains *mōksham*.

If we think why He suddenly mentions two other names, He has made it clear that Prakruthi is *Kshēthram* and Purusha is *Kshēthrajna*.

It is here that he has given the substance of '*nithyā nithya vasthu vivēkam*' which we are considering. What is called Purusha in Sankya *Śāsthram* is called *āthmā* or Brahman in Adhvaitha *Śāsthram*. What is Prakruthi in *Sāṅkya* is *māyā* in Adhvaitham although there is some difference. It is due to *māyā* the impermanent universe appears. It is known that *āthmā* is the permanent truth. Therefore '*nithyā nithya vasthu vivēkam*' is to distinguish the work of *māyā* from the *āthmā* and realize it. In '*āthmānāthma vivēka*' '*anāthmā*' is *māyā*. Therefore understanding the distinction between Prakruthi - Purusha is to discriminate between *anāthmā* and *āthmā*.

When one becomes '*āthma jnāni*' there will be no *anāthmā* at all. That will take place later. In *Proudānubhūthi* *Āchāryā* has written that in the bliss of Adhvaitha the *jnāni* talks about it in the royal way and in a manner that those who are not knowledgeable will think that he is proud. In that *Āchāryā* himself says that the very talk of '*āthmā anāthma vivēchanam*' is absurd. Where is *anāthmā*? If it is there how can it be rejected as being false?' Yet these are the words of one who has had the experience. But for the one who is yet to have the experience the question will be 'Is there an *āthmā*? We see that it is *anāthmā* which is prevailing widely'. While concluding *Bhaja Govindam*, in the last but one *śloka* He has given *Upadēsam* that the distinction between *āthmā* and *anāthmā* should be carefully made by those who have not attained the state of *jnāna* and who are making efforts towards it.

Pratīyamam prathyāhāram

Nithyānithya vivēka vichāram

Because of his concern that we may not be able to make the distinction intelligently, *Āchāryā* himself has given a long list of

what all are *anāthmā* in his work '*AnāthmasrīVigarhaṇam*'. In that in every *ślōkā* each of the first three lines ends with 'Thathahkim?' 'What is it that can be got from it? What is its use?' In each line he mentions things like royal honour, wealth, clothes, decoration, beauty of the body, strength etc, which we think are great and says 'Thathahkim'. In the fourth line the statement : '*ēna swāthmā naiva sākshāthkruthō (a)bhūth*' will be repeated. The *ślōkā* is so formed that we can understand 'when one does not have *āthma sākshāthkāram* what is the use of royal honour, wealth, clothes, beauty, strength etc' One does not know who he himself is; for such a one what does it mean to have royal honour, wealth, this, that etc? If someone says 'we do not know who that person is but we are going to honour him and present him a purse how mad will it be? That is what *Āchāryā* shows here. For one who does not know his true state of *āthmā* what can be of any use? For one who realizes the *āthmā* all these are trash. Only if all these are discarded as trash one can know the *āthmā*. Therefore in any state all that we consider to be great like honour, wealth etc are not required. Rejecting all these as *anāthmā* is *AnāthmasrīVigarhaṇam*. 'Sri' means Lakshmi, what is auspicious - wealth etc as all people know. But the word has another meaning namely 'poison'. It is because *Siva* has kept poison - '*Śrī*' - in his throat He is called *Śrīkantan*. *AnāthmasrīVigarhaṇam* is to know what appears to be wealth as the poison of *anāthmā* and to condemn it. This is another name for '*Nithyānithya vasthu vivēkam*' which is also '*āthmanāthma vivēkam*'.

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VAIRĀGYAM: (DISTASTE FOR WORLDLY DESIRES)

Weighing '*nithyā and anithyā*' one should accept what deserves to be taken and discard what is not. Discarding is more important than accepting what can be accepted. In life, out of what should be done and what should not be done, it does not matter if

what should be done is not done but if we do what should not be done we are in for great trouble. Someone has cold. He is told 'Take rice with pepper powder. Do not take icecream'. It does not matter if he does not take rice with pepper powder. But if he takes icecream the cold will worsen and he will get fever. Just as when we take what is prohibited the adverse result is immediate, if it is asked whether there will be instant good effect if you take what is permitted the answer is it does not. If we take bath in *Kāvēri* close to the banks of the river it will be enjoyable. But one who does not know swimming should not go deep into the river. If he goes he will be caught in the whirlpool. It does not matter if bath is not taken in *Kāvēri*. Even if bath is taken and that time the mind is pure and clear we do not perceive any immediate improvement of health or acquiring of *puṇya*. But if we go deep inside we will be washed away. In this sport of *Mahāmāyā* there is greater power for those forces which do harm. Therefore foremost importance should be given to analyzing what is conducive to Self-development and what is harmful to it, discard what will cause harm.

As already mentioned when it is said 'later' it does not mean that we should go to the second step after completing the first. It will have to be practiced in a mixed way. In such a practice whichever is prominent is referred to as coming 'later' in the series of steps.

When the embryo grows to a child all parts grow together and not part by part. In the same way these practices are not done one after the other but side by side. In that, at each stage, there will be more concentration on a particular thing.

First it is segregation of the good and the bad. While so doing the practice of taking the good and rejecting the bad will develop. Then it will become automatic because of having practiced it for a long time. At that stage the concentration should be on rejecting what is to be rejected.

That is the second step in *Sādhana Chathushtayam*. It is called *vairāgyam*, also called *virakthi*. '*Rāgam and rākthi*' mean desire. Giving up desire is *vairāgyam* or *virakthi*.

Sensual pleasures cause the greatest harm to self-knowledge. When we go in search of some pleasure the reason for it is the desire to enjoy it. If the desire is not there we will not go in search of it.

Therefore discarding those which harm spiritual development means the *vairāgyam* with which all desires are given up - from such a petty desire to eat peanuts to getting Bharath Ratna.

At the height of *vairāgyam* *Thirumūlar* calls for cutting off desires even if it be for the Lord and says that more the desire greater will be sorrow and as desire is given up there will be bliss. If desire goes completely, *mōksham* will materialize instantly. *Nammāzhvār* also has said 'the moment attachment goes away *mōksham* will be close at hand.'

In the scriptural books of the Buddhists it is said that Buddha with one great and sustained effort found out that the thirst for sensual pleasures is like the desire to drink water when one is thirsty and only when that goes *Nirvāṇā* can be attained. No religion born in civilized societies will fail to give importance to the destruction of desires.

Our *Āchāryā* also has accorded very great importance to *vairāgyam* necessary for destruction of desires. When mentioning the steps of *sāadhanā* in *Aparōkshānubhūthi* he refers chiefly to *vairāgyam* - '*Vairāgyādhi chatushtayam*' he says - four part discipline of *vairāgyam* etc.

Āchāryā has defined *vairāgyam* thus :

*Thath vairāgyam jugupsā yā dharsana sravanadhibihih
Dhēhādhi brahma paryanthē hyanithyē bhōgya vasthuni*

He begins dramatically by saying 'Thath *vairāgyam*' - 'that is *vairāgyam*'.

What is that? *Vairāgya* is the disgust for all impermanent things - the pleasures that can be obtained by body - by seeing, hearing etc - from the ordinary things of the world upto the objects of pleasure in *Brahma lōkam*.

Jugupsā means the feeling to reject a thing due to disgust for it. It is also called '*Jihāsā*'.

Once *jnāna* dawns there will be love towards everything. There will be no disgust or hatred. This is because no bad desire of significance will disturb him. But it is not so in the earlier stage. Only if we can discard all things of sensual pleasures which are capable of making us slip we can save the *āthmā*. The feeling of disgust is preliminary to become love personified later.

The disgust is not for people; not at all. It is for the attachment and bondage caused by them. It is for the little pleasures they may be able to give. Leaving home is not due to being disgusted with the mother or wife or children. The disgust is because the attachment and fetter created by them prevent us from going deep into spiritual matters. The mother cooks tasty food and tempts the son saying 'Why are you starving in the name of *vratham*?' and thus causes harm to his spiritual well-being. Like this it is the disgust for various activities with these people and objects of enjoyment. Even in the *ślōkā* we have seen that it is said '*Bhōgya vasthu jugupsah*' - the disgust is for things and not for beings. In other words moving away from people is not out of disgust for them but because due to them we develop liking for enjoyment. Knowing by discrimination that all objects of enjoyment are impermanent and to develop disgust for them is *vairāgyam*.

Only if we develop disgust we will not indulge in things that create the bondage of *māyā*. If we have the attitude 'let them be

there' it will not be *sāthvikam* but will be foolish. *Thiruvalluvar* also says that 'Not to have fear for something which is to be feared is foolish'. The *Upadēsam* of *Thirukural* is that man must be fearless. But before he becomes really like that he should not be foolhardy. Therefore *Thiruvalluvar* says 'In the world one has to fear what needs to be feared and steer clear of it; otherwise it will be foolish'. *Āchāryā* who preaches love for everything says that in the beginning stages we should develop disgust for things which are not useful for spiritual development and instead cause harm to it.

He gives a very impressive comparison. In *Bhala Bodha Sangraham*, *Aparōkshānubhūthi* and *Sarva Vēdhānthā Siddhānthā Sāra Sangraham* he has given the same comparison which itself will be disgusting. In *Aparōkshānubhūthi* and *Bhāla Bōdha Sangraham* he says '*Yadhaiva kākavishtayam*' and in *Sarva Vēdhānthā Siddhānthā Sāra Sangraham* he says '*Kākasya vishtāvath asahya buddhi*' - we should have the same aversion to the objects of enjoyment as we have for the droppings of the crow. Supposing we are sitting under a tree and having a grand dinner and just at that time the droppings of a crow fall on our head, we will at once feel disgusted and move away from there. After that even if the crows are driven away and food is again served on a fresh leaf we will not like to eat it. *Āchāryā* has said that to develop such a disgust for objects of enjoyment is *vairāgyam*. When that *vairāgyam* takes serious shape taking food under the tree itself will be as disgusting as the droppings of the crow and as *Āchāryā* has said we will feel like taking what is got through bikshai just to satisfy the hunger like taking medicine for disease.

This disgust should not only be for the pleasure giving objects of this world but also for the great enjoyment that can be had with divine body in *Brahma lōkam* : *Dēhādhi brahma paryanthē*.

What we need is only *Brahmam* which is *Nirgunam* and formless and we should discard even *Brahma* who is a god with

form and also the enjoyment he will give in his world (Brahma lōkam). When speaking of *vairāgyam* in *Sādhana Chatushtayam* in order to make this clear, Āchāryā uses long adjectives : *Ihāmudrārtha bhōga viragam* or *Ihāmudhra phala bhōga virāgam*.

'Iha' plus 'amudhra' is equal to *Ihamudhra*. 'Iha' means this world in which we are now; 'amudhra' means the world which is not near but somewhere far away - the *Pithrulōkam*, *Indralōkam* etc. The several worlds of different kinds of *Dēvās* and the world of Brahma are included in it. Even the experiences of that Brahma lōkam are not the experience of the *āthmā*. The joy that we get there is not the bliss of the 'Self' (*āthmanubhavam*). The joy of Brahma lōkam will get destroyed in the 'praḷaya' (*Brahma kalpa praḷayam*) - deluge. Since the happiness attained there will be the happiness experienced in the state of duality (difference between *jīvā* and *Paramāthmā*) it will not be even a miniscule fraction of the bliss of experiencing the identity of *Jīva-Brahma*.

Those who have *vairāgya* are called 'Vītharāgar'. In *Mundakōpanishad* the rishis have been described as those who found fulfillment through *jnāna*, those who had experienced the *āthmā* and were 'Vītharāgar'.

The disgust born of *vairāgya* has another name - 'nirvēdham'. If total unconcern for worldly things develops that is *nirvēdham*. In *Alankāra Sāsthrā* it is said that it is this feeling which becomes the cause for the 'juice' of peace (*sāntha rasam*). The Upanishad that talks of *vītharāgam* also talks about *nirvēdhā*. Āchāryā in his *bāshyam* says that *nirvēdham* (which is formed by adding 'Ni' to the root 'vidh') means *vairāgyam*. The yajnas called *Ishta* and *Pūtham* and social service activities are spoken of highly as *Vairāgyārthē* in *Karmā mārgām*. But even these are preliminaries which have to lead to *jnāna yōgā* and then move away. Those who do not understand that these belong only to *karmā yōgam* but think that they can take them to the goal are

referred to in that Upanishad as 'pramūdar' that is not ordinary fools but big fools. Two *manthrās* further on it is said 'If a Brahmin is intelligent he must understand that Swargam and other states that can be attained through even the highest form of *karmā* are impermanent, gain the knowledge that the actionless Brahman cannot be attained through activities and develop 'nirvėdham'; then he should go to a guru who is a Brahma Nishtar, receive *Upadėsam* and must attain *Brahma Jnānam*.'

We have seen that *Karmā yōgam* is the first stage and taking *sanyāsam* for attaining *Brahma Jnānam* is the third stage. We have also seen that what comes as the second stage is *Sādhana Chatushtayam* and the second step in that is *vairāgyam*. But here the first stage of *karmā* has been mentioned, then *vairāgyam* and then straightaway the third stage of *Brahmajnānōpadėsam*. This means that if we stick firmly to *vairāgyam* all the steps of *Sādhana Chatushtayam* will come automatically.

In his *bāshyam* on this Upanishad, *Āchāryā*, several *manthrās* before this, when talking about *Apara Vidhyā* relating to the world and *Para Vidhyā* pertaining to the soul (spiritual) says 'any one can read the *Brahma Vidhyā* which gives *Brahma Jnāna* and gain that *jnānam*; but if experience has to be gained it is possible only if refuge is taken unto a guru with *vairāgyam* - *Gurvābhigāmanādhi lakshaṇam vairāgyam* - and thus makes particular mention of *vairāgyam*.

We have seen the characteristics of *vairāgyam* as given by *Āchāryā* - disgust for what we see and hear - *dharsana srāvānādhībhi jugupsā* - If he talks of 'what we see' and 'what we hear' Krishna *Paramāthmā* talks of 'What is to be heard' and : 'What has been heard' : '*Śrōthāvyasya sruthasya cha*' (II-52). What we have heard is all the useless things which have filled our brain. We are eager to know so many things - that is 'What is to be heard'

Bhagawān talks of 'nirvėdham' in both. In his *bāshyam* on this *Āchāryā* has given the meaning *vairāgyam* for *nirvėdham*. Here *Bhagawān* has said that if the mind which becomes dirty in the slush of 'mōham', comes out of it, it will develop *vairāgyam* in 'what has been heard' and 'what is to be heard'. Getting dirtied by *mōham* has been clearly explained as 'the sense of discrimination of *āthmā* and *anāthmā* getting muddled up'. That is what is said first in *Chatushtayam*. The next is *vairāgyam*. *Bhagawān* also has spoken of these in the same order in this *ślokā*. *Vairāgya* is to be without *rāgam* that is desire. One who is like that is a *vairāgi*. We refer to the wandering sadhus who come from the North as *Bairāgi*. It is actually *Vairāgi*. *Vairāgyam* has been equated to *Sanyāsam*. The one who has given up *rāga* is *Vairāgi*. But one who is in the grip of desire is a *rāgi*. Such a person has been referred to in *Upanishad* as 'Kāmayamānan'. Since one gets destroyed by *kāma* the one with desire is referred to in the *Upanishad* as 'Kāmahathan'. In the same way, one who is not a victim of desire is called 'Akāmayamānan' or 'Akāmahathan'.

It is usual to give the same meaning to both '*rāgam* and *kāma*' and talk of them together. But between them there is some difference too. In one place in *Gītā* (Chapter 7-11) *Bhagawān* has said '*Kāma rāga vivarjitham*'. It means 'What is in that *kāma* and *rāgam*'. Since the two have been mentioned it is seen that *kāma* and *rāgam* are different. In such contexts where things are not clear to us *Āchāryā* by his intellectual prowess makes them clear. Here, *kāma* means the thirst for things which we have not got till now. *Rāgam* is the attachment to the things which we have got already. But here there is no need to make such a minute difference. It is enough if we say that both mean desire.

The *Upanishad* says that the one who has no *vairāgyam* is a *Kāmayamānan* and the one who has *vairāgyam* is *Akāmayamānan*. It says that the *Kāmayamānan* thinks that *karmā* is everything and does *karmānushtānam* and enjoys its fruit in the other world and

when that is exhausted he is born again and keeps circling in *kāma* only. The *vairāgi* who is *Akāmaya mānan* is 'akāman' that is without desire, 'nishkāman' and then 'āpthakāman' who attains what he had desired (he is *akāman* when he discards his desire and later when desires go away from him without his effort he becomes *nishkāman*) - when the Upanishad goes on saying like this a question arises 'where is desire for a *Akāmaya mānan*? The ephithet that follows it makes it clear - the one who is 'akāman' 'nishkāman' and 'āpthakaman' has been referred to as 'āthmakāman' that is his desire is only for the *āthmā*. When he attains it he becomes *āpthakāman*. The life of such a *vairāgi* will not go to another world after death; the Upanishad says that even when he is alive he is *Brahmam* and even after the body dies he subsides in *Brahmam*. Being desireless, that is to have *vairāgyam* has been prescribed as qualification for such experience of *Brahmam* - '*Brahmānubhavam*'.

In *Thaithirīya* and *Bṛuhadhāraṇya* Upanishads it has been said (with slight variation between the two) - only he who is not merely a '*srothriyan*' (one who has deep knowledge of *Vēdhā*) but is also a '*akāmahathan*' (one who does not perish on account of desire) will get the happiness of one who rules the entire world, multiplied several hundred times, from one higher world to another higher world and finally attains *Brahmānandam*. I have said this to point out that here too destruction of *kāma*, that is having *vairāgyam* has been mentioned as the chief qualification.

In *Gītā* too (VI-35) *Bhagawān* places emphasis on two things, namely, '*abhyāsam*' and '*vairāgyam*'. One should make continuous effort to pull back and stop the mind which keeps wandering. Perseverance, continuous practice - that is *Abhyāsam*. *Bhagawān* has said that *vairāgyam* is another which is necessary to keep the mind under control.

At the commencement of *Upadēsam* (*Gītā* II-55) when talking of the characteristic of a '*sthithaprajna*' the first

characteristic mentioned is '*Prajahāthi yadhā Kāmān sarvān pārtha manōgathān*' (II-55). That is *vairāgyam*. In the last chapter when talking of what should be done for achieving *jnāna* (*jnāna siddhi*) after attaining *siddhi* in *karmā yōgam* He says '*Nithyam vairāgyam samupa-srīthah*' (XVIII-52) - *vairāgyam* must be practiced continuously without a break.

Āchāryā has said in *Vivēka Chūdāmaṇi* that *vairāgyam* is aversion to all that is seen and heard; I said that in *Gītā*, *Bhagawān* has talked of 'What is heard' and 'What is to be heard'. In his *bāshyam* on *vairāgya* occurring in the above *ślōkā*, Āchāryā says : *vairāgyam* is not to have thirst for what we see and what we have not seen - '*dhrushtādhrushteshu vishayeshu vaithrushmnyam.....*' The desire for 'what we have not seen' is the desire for enjoyment in *swargam*, the position of *Indra* etc. If the *Vēdhic karmānushtanās* are performed with the belief that it is the ultimate aid, these enjoyments of *Dēva lōkam* will be gained. Since it cannot be seen by us it is called 'adhrushtam'. *Dhrushtam* is what can be seen and *adhrushtam* is what cannot be seen. We have seen *vairāgyam* of three types. If we consider all the three in totality, *vairāgyam* is discarding all the desires that arise in the mind. *Bhagawān* said '*Sarvān pārtha manōgathān*' - all the desires of the mind. That is an important part of spiritual practice.

Barthruhari was a great man. He has written hundred *ślōkās* about *sanyāsam* and *sanyāsi* elegantly and with emotion. It could have been named '*Sanyāsa sādakam*'. But instead he has given it the name '*Vairāgya sathakam*'. From this we see the view that it is enough if there is *vairāgyam* it is *sanyāsam*.

But what does *San-yāsam* mean? It is renouncing completely. It is only if desire is given up all other things can be renounced. Therefore it is not surprising that *San-yāsam* has come to mean *vairāgyam*.

Thiruvalluvar is a great man who has dealt with dharma (in Tamil). In the chapter in which he talks about renunciation he says that it is becoming attached to *Paramāthmā* who has no attachment and giving up all other attachments. Attachment is born out of desire. Or if we develop connection with something or attachment to it we develop a desire for it. Just as *Bhagawān* said '*Sangāth sanjāyathē kāmah*' (Ch. II-62). Desire and attachment are the cause and the effect.

Renouncing all wealth and going away is *vairāgyam*. Valluvar has said it beautifully that such *vairāgyam* itself is great wealth and there is nothing in this world or the *Dēva lōkā* to equal it.

Sadāsiva Brahmēndrāl has also echoed the same view. When he talks of a *sanyāsi* himself as a king he says '*Swīkrutha vairāgya sarvasvan*'. It means that one who has taken over the entire property called *vairāgyam*. He himself was like that. It is because Barthuhari, *Thiruvalluvar* and *Brahmēndrāl* were themselves *vairāgis* what they say about *vairāgyam* touches our heart - that is just for the time being! Although it is very difficult for us to cultivate *vairāgyam* we know from these great men how if only we can develop *vairāgyam* we can experience '*āthmanandham*' by which we will consider all other wealth mere trash. Our *Āchāryā* also left home when he was just eight years, giving up everything including his mother who had considered him her very life and poured great love on him. He has also sung a Panchakam in which in every *ślōkā* he says 'Is there a man so fortunate as the one with a mere loincloth?' In *Bhaja Govindham* also he asks '*Kasya sukam na karōdhi virāgah?*' - Is there anyone to whom *vairāgyam* will not give great bliss?

When we speak of *vairāgyam* there is another person who will come to mind without fail. He is *Pattināthār* (a Tamil saint). He was born like *Kubēra*, carried on sea trade and was a very wealthy person. But with great *vairāgyam* he left all his wealth and left

home with a mere loincloth and a begging bowl. Later, it is said, he thought that even keeping a begging bowl is a blemish on renunciation and broke that also. His sayings are full of the message of *vairāgyam*. Those who hear them will develop virakthi at least at that time.

There is a story that Barthuhari was his *śiṣhyā*. In Tamil Nadu Barthuhari is called Badragiri. Barthuhari who was king of Ujjain became a *sanyāsi*, came to Thiruvidaïmarudūr (in Tamil Nadu) and with just a bowl for taking bikshai he used to sit at the western tower of the temple. He used to collect bikshai for his guru (*Pattināthār*) also and give him. *Pattināthār* used to be sitting at the eastern tower of the same temple. One who was king of Ujjain and the other who was an aspect of *Kubēra* were *sanyāsis* with such great *vairāgyam*. Then it appears *Pattināthār* thought that Barthuhari's *vairāgyam* was not strong enough because he was keeping a bowl for taking bikshai. A poor person went to *Pattināthār* and asked for food. It is said that *Mahālingēswarar* (the deity of the temple) had come in that form. *Pattināthār* told him, 'I have nothing. You are asking me. You go to the western tower. There is a family man sitting there. You go and ask him. You also tell him that I have asked you to tell like this'. That person went to Barthuhari and told him what he had heard from *Pattināthār*. When Barthuhari heard this he thought '*Gurunāthā* has said that I am a family man!' As he thought for a minute he broke the only possession he had, namely, the bowl.

There is a similar incident in the life of *Brahmēndrā* also. He has sung 'the *sanyāsi* who has his folded hands for a pillow, the sky as the pull-over, the rough ground as the bed and virakthi as the wife is deeply engrossed in the sleep of *samādhi*'. True to what he has sung he was one day lying in a field when it was mid-day. Just at that time some women who were working in the field passed that way. One of them saw him, laughed and making fun of him

remarked 'see this *sanyāsi*. He wants to have his head raised while lying!' *Brahmēndrāl* felt hurt by this remark. 'The feeling that I should have the head in a raised position has not left me. When that has not gone what kind of a *sanyāsi* am I? It is *Ambāl* only who came as that woman and gave this *Upadēsam* to me', he thought and removed his hand on which the head was resting.

Those women came again to that spot on their return. The woman who had earlier made fun of him laughed again and said 'Should not a *Swāmiyār* (respectable term referring to *sanyāsis*) himself know how he should be? What kind of a *sanyāsi* is this who acts on what is told by the passers-by?

From that day *Brahmēndrāl* became Brahman. Even the ordinary people had known how much *vairāgya* a *sanyāsi* should have. It is in such a country there are *sanyāsis* who say that they cannot be without coffee, without ovaltine! If they are asked they will say 'we have gone above the stage of *sanyāsam*. We are *Adhivārīāśrami*. As that woman said, we know what we can do and we should not do'. Instead of creating confusion like this if one has to attain *āthmājanam*, *vairāgyam* is very, very, very necessary. It is said that the day *vairāgyam* sets in, one should at once leave the home : 'Yathaharēva virajēth thathāharēva pravrajēth' *

(*This *manthrā* is in *Jāpālōpanishad* and some other Upanishads).

Leaving *karmā* and home merely out of disgust that what we have is not permanent happiness will be of no use. Such disgust should be developed along with the thought of *āthmā* which is permanent bliss. Then only it will become proper *sādhana* and take us to the permanent bliss. After attaining siddhi the disgust also will disappear and one will be full of love. It is said that neither *vairāgya* without *vivēkam* nor *vivēkam* without *vairāgya* will be helpful.

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SIX KINDS OF WEALTH

The third step is called '*Āmādhī Shadga Sampaththi*'. The fourth is '*Mumukshuthvam*'.

There are six parts '*Āmādhī Shadga Sampaththi*' - *Samanam*, *dhamanam*, *uparathi*, *thithikshai*, *śraddhā*, *samādhānam*. Of these all people would be knowing only *śraddhā*. One of the six is *samādhānam*. You may think that you know the meaning of this. But the meaning I am going to give is different from what you have in mind.

Āmādhī and not *samādhī*. It is the '*Ā*' used in *Śāṅkara* and not the '*Sa*' in *Sa Ri Ga Ma*.

Āsama plus ādhi is equal is to Āmādhī-Āsamam etc. '*Shadga*' - a formation of six things. *Sampaththi* is *Sampath* or wealth. Here it is spiritual wealth.

Āmādhīh : *Āchāryā* has referred to all the six as '*Āsamanam*' etc. In *Brahma Sūthram* it is said '*Āsamadhamādhī*' - that is '*samam*' '*dhamam*' etc. - *Āsamadhamādhī upēdhasyāth*. It means that for one to attain *jñāna* he must practice *samam*, *dhamam* etc. *Brahma Sūthram* says 'that is the rule' - *thath vidhēh*. Who framed the rule? It is *Vēdhā* only. It is *Īśwarā* who has made the rule through the *Vēdhās*. If we try to find where in the *Vēdhās* it is said that '*Āsama dhama*' etc should be practiced it is in *Bṛuhadhāraṇyakōpanishad*. When *Yājñavalkya* gives *Upadēsam* to *Janaka* he says '*Jñāni* will be '*Ānathan*' (having *samam*), *dhānathan* (having *dhamam*) *uparathan* (having *uparathi*). *Thithikshu* (having *thithikshai*). When it is said like this it means that the one who has practiced like this can become a *jñāni*. Here except *śraddhā* all the other five are mentioned. *Āchāryā* has also referred to them in the same order as mentioned above. *Śraddhā* is basic to all things. In *Śruthi* and in some other places this has been laid down. Therefore that also has been included. Thus they are six - *samam* etc.

ŚAMAM - DHAMAM

WHAT IS ŚAMAM?

*‘Virajya vishaya vrāthāth dhōsha dhrushtyā muhurmuhuh
Swalakshyē niyathā(a) vasthā manasah sama uchyathē*

These are the characterists of ‘samam’ given by Āchāryā.

The objects of the enjoyment of the five senses - sound, touch, form, taste, smell - are called ‘vishaya vrātham’. After constantly thinking over this with *vivēkam* and *vairāgyam* and realizing that these are harmful to the soul and discarding them with disgust is referred to as ‘muhurmuhuh dhōsha dhrushtyā virajya’. Muhurmuhuh means often; ‘dhōsha dhrushtya’ means taking note of the blemish in the enjoyment of the sense objects; realizing that because they cause harm to the soul they are vitiated by blemish, to develop aversion, disgust.

The mind always remains agitated by constantly thinking of those which it thinks give pleasure. That is why we do not know the joy of peace. If we realize the blemish in the objects of enjoyment and discard them with disgust we can make the mind remain steady in the *āthmā* which is of the form of peace. Constantly thinking of the blemish caused by ‘vishaya vrātham’ and discarding them and then controlling the mind and making it remain steady in one’s goal (swalakshya) is called *samam* - *sama uchyathē*. Putting it briefly, *samam* means controlling the mind.

The reason why the mind goes after objects of enjoyment is the impression of previous experiences carried over through several births. Even after the death of the physical body that impression enters into the subtle body and when life takes another birth and enters a new body it becomes active again. Therefore if those impressions are completely given up the mind will of its own calm down. The definition of ‘samam’ itself as given in ‘*Aparōkshānubhūthi*’ is this. The definition mentioned earlier is

given in *Viveka Chūdamanī*:

Sadhāiva vāsanā-thyāgaḥ samō(a)yamīthi saphithah

‘*Sāma*’ means completely giving up the impressions which induce thoughts of enjoyment.’ If it is understood that *samam* is controlling the mind, it is enough.

Dhamam which comes next means controlling the sense organs. There is a lot to be said about *samam*. Since control of the mind and of the sense organs are closely linked, I shall tell something basic about dhamam and talk in detail about both *samam* and dhamam.

Karmēndriyās (the organs of action) are five - the hands, feet, mouth and the organs of excretion. The *jñānēndriyās* (sense organs) are five, the ears, the skin, eyes, tongue and the nose. The *jñānēndriyās* do not carry out any action on their own as do the *karmēndriyās* but experience what is external to them like hearing a sound, feeling the touch, seeing the forms, savoring the taste and smelling the different scents.

All the troubles arise only because these indriyas are not kept under control. It is because of the desire for the pleasures that each of these indriyas give, the *jīvā* is under bondage to this illusory world. It is only if they are kept under control, we can attain the spiritual world. It is such control which is called dhamam. The direct meaning of both dhamam and *samam* is only ‘to keep under control’. But controlling the indriyas which get enjoyment through external objects and controlling the mind which generates thoughts and which is in the constant state of agitation are two different things. *Sāma* means to control the mind and dhamam the control of the sense organs. It is because both are ‘controlling’ Āchāryā in *Shadpādhi Sthōthram* has, in the beginning, used the word ‘*dhamaya manah*’ to say ‘control the mind’ and for controlling the sense organs which go after the external things he says ‘*samaya vishaya mruga thrushṇām*’.

Since both *dhamam* and *śamam* have the meaning 'to control', when talking together of control of the mind and the senses, calling it *dhamam* or *samam* is correct. In *Bṛuhadhāranyakam* also it is like that. When the *Dēvās* say that Brahma gave them the *Upadēsam* 'Be with control' it is only *dhamam* which is used. 'Dhamyatha' means 'Be with control'.

Another name of Bharatha, the son of *Śakunthala* and Dushyantha, is Sarvadhanaman - means who controls and rules all. Because Damayanthi had such beauty that could put down the beauty of all other women she had that name. Whoever one may be, even a Chakravarthi, when the time comes, Yama brings him under his control and takes away the life and therefore Yama is called '*Śamanan*'.

The words '*damanam*' and '*dhān্থi*' are derived from '*dhama*' and the words '*samanam*' and '*sān্থi*' from '*sama*'. *Śaman* - *sān্থi* are more in use than *dhamanam* - *dhān্থi*. We talk of the *samanam* of heat, anger etc. Although the meaning is 'to control' or 'to suppress' it is understood as alleviating the heat etc. *Sān্থi* also instead of being understood as suppression of agitation indicates the state of 'quiet peace'.

Sān্থi - the state of the mind being under control; *dhān্থi* - the state of the senses being under control. It is the practice to call the 'Yathis' (*sanyāsis*) as '*Śān্থi dhān্থi bhūmnām*'.

The organs such as the eyes and ears can be kept closed without seeing or hearing anything. The hands and legs can be tied so that they cannot act. But even then the mind will be roaming about without control. Even if external objects are not experienced by the sense organs the mind imagines them, hankers after them and keeps struggling. The sense organs too act due to the prompting of the mind and to satisfy its desires. Therefore it is enough if the mind is controlled. All the free runs of the senses will stop. It is because of the importance of controlling the mind

'*samanam*' is said first and then 'dhamanam' in *Sāadhanā* (spiritual practice).

It may be said that once *samanam* is achieved dhamanam will automatically be there and therefore it is enough if only *samanam* is mentioned. The complete control of the mind, its destruction will come only in the last stage. What have been said here are the stages prior to that. Effort has to be made from the beginning for the destruction of the mind. But mind will come under control only just for that time. If the eyes see some sweets, its smell will reach the nose and all control will fly off. Thus when external things are perceived by the senses and they hanker after them the mind which was under control for sometime will again cut loose and fly off. Till the highest stage is reached the mind will remain controlled only so long as external things are not there which attract. But once they are there the mind will again start roaming. At such times the eyes, the nose, the hands and the legs are to be controlled. That is why dhamam has been separately mentioned after *samam*.

In *Katōpanishad* a beautiful comparison has been given for mind and the indriyas. The *jīvā* is like the master who is seated in the chariot. The body is the chariot. Buddhi is the charioteer (*sārathi*). It is a chariot drawn by several horses. The horses are the senses. The *sārathi* should hold the reins and drive the horses and make them run on the proper path. The rein is the mind. If the *sārathi* (buddhi - it is the intellect that has been strengthened by *vivēka* and *vairāgyam*) controls the rein so that the horses (*indriyās*) go on the path of spirituality and the destination of *sākshāthkāram* will arrive. When that arrives, the horses, the rein, the *sārathi* etc can be untied and sent away and the master (*jīvā*) can remain experiencing the *āthmā*.

When dhamam is spoken of as the subjugation of the indriyas, usually the *jñānēndriyās* only are referred to. Just as the *jñānēndriyās* act according to the directions of the mind it is by the

prodding of the *jnānēndriyās* that the *karmēndriyās* carry out the functions. Therefore, the subjugation of the *karmēndriyās* is not spoken of separately. '*Panchēndriya Nigrahām*' usually refers only to the *jnānēndriyās*. In *Vivēka Chūdāmāni* it is said 'the deer meets its death by the sound it hears (when the hunter plays the flute the deer gets absorbed in it and stands still. At that time it is caught); the elephant meets its end by the experience of touch (a female elephant which is already trained is made to go near it. In the joy of its touch the male elephant will forget itself and it is caught); the moth gets destroyed by the light it sees (it is attracted by the glow of light and goes near it and gets killed); the fish gets destroyed by taste (it tries to eat the worm or insects kept in the fishing hook and gets caught); the honeybee gets killed by enjoying smell - it is attracted by the smell of the champacca flower and goes and sits in it. The flower will then close up and the bee will die inside due to suffocation. Thus, in the case of other beings it is only one of the *panchēndriyas* that causes destruction of each of them. In the case of man all the five are the cause of desires of different kinds. What then will be his fate? Thus only the *jnānēndriyās* are mentioned as the cause of destruction.

But in the beginning (of *Vivēka Chūdāmāni*) *Āchāryā* has, while defining *dhamam* as '*Ubayēshām indriyāñām*' - the *indriyas* of both kinds are to be turned away from the objects of their enjoyment and should be subjugated and that is *dhamam*.

Vishayēbhyaḥ parāvarthya sthāpanam swa swa gōlakē
Ubhayēshām indriyāñām sa dhamah parikīrthithah

(V.C. 23)

He says 'Both the types of *indriyās* should be pulled away from the objects of their enjoyment, subjugated and made to remain steady - each within its own orbit. Doing like that has been specially said to be *dhamam*.

Pulling back the indriyas from the object of the enjoyment can be understood. What does it mean to say that each should be made to remain steady in its own orbit?

How I have understood this or I think I have understood is : *Āchāryā* has not said that all the ten indriyas should be completely subjugated and nothing should be seen, heard or eaten or no action should be performed with the hand and leg. If there is such total stoppage of the functions of all the indriyas one cannot remain alive. If that be so how to do *Sādhana*? There should be a wall for a picture to be drawn. Whatever is required for the life's journey has to be done - eating, seeing, hearing etc. That which limits these to basic necessities is the circle (orbit) for each of the indriyas.

Bhagawān said 'If no action is performed life's journey will become impossible. Do not do like that. Do whatever is laid down for you.' - *Niyatham kuru karma thvam sarīra yāthrāphi cha the na prasidhyēdh akarmaṇah* (III.8) This has to be applied here and correctly understood. The planets keep moving around the sun, each in its orbit. This is necessary for life in the world to go on and so long as they keep to their orbits everything will be fine. Supposing even one planet swerves from its orbit how harmful would it be! Or if the planets do not move at all then also there will be trouble. In the same manner, only if all the indriyas function within their orbits life is journey will go on.

Adding the mind to the indriyas they are said to be eleven. It is also said that the eleven Rudras (*Ēkādaśa Rudras*) one each of them is the presiding deity of each one of the indriyas. The fasting on *Ēkādaśi* day, philosophically speaking, is denying food to all the eleven *indriyās*. *Manu* has said 'the mind should be understood as the eleventh *indriyā* which associates itself with all the other ten *indriyās*. If victory is gained over it all the remaining ten would have been won over.'

*Ēkādaśam manō jñeyam svagunēnōbhayāthmakam
Yasmin jithē jithāvēthou bhavathah panchakau ganau*

There is also another kind of classification. Adding the mind to the *jñānēndriyās* it is said that *indriyas* are six. *Bhagawān* says '*Indriyānām manaschāsmi*' (X-22) - 'Among the *indriyās* I am the mind'. In another place he spells this out more clearly : '*Manah shashtānindriyāni*' (XV - 7) - mind is one of the six *indriyās*. *Achāryā* also has expressed such a view. *Indriyā* is also called '*karaṇām*'. Because it does the function of satisfying the *jīvā*'s desires it has got that name. The mind remains inside a *jīvā* and plans, experiences joy and sorrow etc. Therefore it is called '*anthahkaraṇām*'. Connecting this with the five *jñānēndriyās* which do their functions externally he compares them to a bee and speaks in *Soundarya Lahari* - '*Majjivah karaṇacharaṇah shadcharaṇathām*' (*Ślōkā 90*). The bee has six legs. Similarly the *jiva* has the six *karaṇās*. Movement is done only with the legs. Since the six sense organs are responsible for all the movements that a *jīvā* makes in life these six are like legs. That is what is called '*karaṇa charaṇām*'. Since it is only the bee which has six legs man also is like a bee. The bee goes and sits on the lotus flower and remains there forgetting itself. He prays to *Ambālī* that similarly his life should get the quality of the bee which is in Her lotus feet. When that happens *samam* and *dhamam* will be achieved and life will be engrossed in Her. *Āchāryā* speaks of *Ambālī*'s feet. She has in Her hand the sugarcane bow and the five weapons. That bow also will control the mind and create *samam*; the five weapons control the five *indriyas* and creates *dhamam*.

Thus, control of the mind and the senses should go hand in hand and be complimentary to each other. Sometimes the *indriyās* go after the enjoyment of sense objects involuntarily in which case we may perhaps say that they do so without the involvement of the mind. Otherwise all activities of the *indriyās* are all done by the mind only. Even when the *indriyās* are after something it is because

they are prompted by the mind deliberately for satisfying its own desire. While they may run involuntarily on their own there is no question of their stopping on their own. It is only the mind which has to control the *indriyās* and stop them. Therefore not only *samam* (which is control of the mind) but dhamam which is control of the sense organs involves the function of the mind. It is only the mind which achieves both. That is why *samam* - dhamam go together.

Krishna *Paramāthmā* says '*Indriyāṇi manasā niyamya*' (III.7) - controlling the sense organs by the mind. He thus refers to dhamam as the function of the mind only. In another place, he says '*manasaivēndriya grāmam viniyamya*' (VI-24) - controlling the sense organs by the mind itself (to make it clear that it is by the mind only he says '*manasa ēva*'). After controlling like that one should slowly become subdued in peace - '*sanaiḥ sanaiḥ uparamēdh*' - It is that uparathi which is the next in the 'six kinds of wealth'. *Uparamēdh* means 'must remain with uparathi'.

Bhagawān talks of *samam* and dhamam together. '*Sarva dwārāṇi samyamya manohrudhi nirudhya cha*' (VIII-12) - Here '*sarva dwārāṇi samyamya*' is dhamam. '*Manohrudhi nirudhyā*' is *samam*. '*Sarva dwārāṇi samyamya*' means plugging all the holes. The holes are the *indriyās*. The holes in the ears, nose and mouth are visible. The skin also has holes though we cannot see them. It is through the pupil of the eye light rays enter and we are able to see objects. Therefore plugging of all the holes means 'dhamam' only.

Bhagawān says 'the different natures of the beings are born from me : '*Bhavanthi bhāvā bhūthānām maththa ēva pruthagvidhāh*' (X - 5). *Bhagawān* says that of the greatest of these (natures) are buddhi, *jñāna*, *asammōham* (not being victim of *mōham*) *kshamā* (patience) *sathyam*, *dhamam*, *samam*'. He thus mentions dhamam and *samam* together and proceeds to say some other things also. When he lists the divine qualities (*Daivi sampath*)

also He says '*Dhānam damascha*' about dhamam and '*Thyāgah sānthi*' about *samam* (XVI 1-2). I have said earlier that *sānthi* results from *samam* and *dhānthi* from dhamam.

A *sanyāsi* is also called a 'yathi'. *Rāmānujā* is being called *Ethirājar*. Some people also have the name 'Ethiraj'. It is actually '*Yathirājar*'. Yathi is a *sanyāsi*. The direct meaning of the word is 'one who has controlled'. Both *Yamā* and *Yathā* indicate controlling. (*Yama* makes people tremble and controls them). Since he takes people to his place and punishes them there that place itself is called '*Samyamanī*'. But the Yathi keeps himself under control. That is why he is referred to as *Yathāthmā* and *Samyathāthmā* in *Gītā* and other *sāsthrās*. If the place where people are being kept suppressed is called *Samyamanī* the *sanyāsi* who has kept himself severely controlled is called *Samyathāthmā* and *Samyami*. He has kept the mind and the indriyas under control. In other words, the one who has achieved *sama dhama* is yathi, *sanyāsi*.

When *Bhagawān* says '*Śraddhāvān labhathē jñānam thathparah samyathēndriyah*' (IV-39) He means that it is the one who with *śraddhā* controls the *indriyās* and is a 'samyathēndriyan' will attain *jñāna*. He has included in this *śraddhā*, *sama dhama* which are part of *Sādhana Chathushtayam*.

When describing the characteristics of '*sthitha prajna*' *Bhagawān* emphasizes the control of the senses by a beautiful comparison. : 'Just as the tortoise pulls back its head, legs etc into its shell at times of danger, one should pull back the *indriyās* from the objects of enjoyment'. All the times when the senses have a free run are times of danger for man. By using a small word '*Sarvaśah*' *Bhagawān* makes it clear that while the tortoise acts like that during times of danger, man must do so all the time because he faces danger all the time.

'Yadhā samharathē chāyam kurmo(a) ngānīva sarvaśah'

In *Bṛuhadāraṇyakam* the Upadeśam given to the *Dēva jāthi* is only dhamam.

The *Dēvās*, humans and the *asurās* approached *Prajāpathi* for giving them *upadeśam*. *Prajāpathi* gave the one letter 'dha' as *upadeśam*. Each group understood this differently. *Dēvās* took it as abbreviation for dhama (indriya nigraham) - dhamyathah. The humans understood it as dhatta - meaning 'be giving, do *dhānam* and dharmam'. The *asurās* understood it as 'dhayathvam' - have compassion. *Āchāryā* in his *bāshyam* has said that all the groups mentioned here are only three different types of human beings. 'Men who have no control over *indriyās* despite having all the qualities are said to be *Dēvās*; those who do not give and who suffer from the blemish of accumulating for themselves are humans and those humans who do not have compassion and consideration are *asurās*'.

From this it is clear that those who have other great qualities lack control over senses. It is not easy to get freed from the desires of the senses which pull the *jīvā* into *māyā*. What is required is *dhama samam*. It can be achieved only by serious practice. One should not do practice in a perfunctory manner and then feel dejected that he has not succeeded. Practice should be done with the thought that it should be continuous and with faith in *Īswarā*.

Even when there are no external objects for the eyes, ears, tongue etc to experience, the mind remains disturbed in the constant thought of the desire for these experiences. Control of the mind is thought control. It is not easy to achieve it. So what can be done with some success is not to physically experience the external objects even if the desire for them does not go away from the mind. That is dhamam. If we observe vratham, *upavāsam* etc, avoid seeing all kinds of things etc with tenacity the mind also will attain some maturity for taking up the practice of *samam*. When external objects of enjoyment are absent, it is possible to some

extent to stop the mind's run. But again when we are in the midst of such objects the senses will at once go after them without any prompting by the mind like the horses running without being controlled by the rein. Now the weapon of dhamam should be used. Then the weapon of *samam* is to be used so that the mind does not run after the objects of enjoyment even when it is surrounded by them. Thus dhamam and *samam* should be practiced alternately in a manner that they appear to be practiced together. Finally, one should reach the state of achievement.

In *Nārāyaṇavalli* (the fourth and final part of *Thaithirīya Upanishad*) practice of dhamam is given to the *brahmachāri* with sympathy and the *Upadēsam* of the practice of *samam* to the *sanyāsi*. It is said that the *brahmachāri* follows it considering it as the supreme thing and enjoys it.

When the mind which has become subdued finally stops, that place is *āthmā*. If the mind stops, *āthmā* will shine. In the first stage itself, the *indriyās* becoming active involuntarily will subside and the mind also would have voluntarily kept them under control. Then it will be necessary to remove only the remaining dirt of impression. In other words, *samam* is the final act of controlling. If the mind stops completely awakening of the *āthmā* will occur. It is because *samam* is the final control we say *sānthih*, *sānthih*, *sānthih* and '*āthma sānthi*' etc. That is why the word '*dhānthi*' is not as much in use as *sānthi*. The reason why the peace that comes after the mind is controlled is called '*sānthi*' is that immediately after it is controlled peace dawns. All great people have prayed for the mind to be controlled. Krishna *Paramāthmā* also has given the same *upadēsam*.

*Yathō yathō nischalathi manas chanchala masthiram
Thathasthathō niyamyaithadh āthmanyēva vasam nayēth*
(VI. 26)

Because he wanted to show clearly the agitated state of the mind which is not stable, he has used two words having the same meaning - chanchalam and asthiram. He says the mind should be pulled back from everything after which it goes and entrusted to the *āthmā*.

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UPARATHI

It is the state in which the mind comes and stops in the *āthmā* namely uparathi which is next in shadgam, . Uparathi means 'it has stopped'. Death is also another meaning - the state of the mind in which it is completely at rest without any work. When by the practice of *sama* and *dharma* the mind gets freed from all the attachments to external things and remains actionless it is uparathi. That is the definition in *Vivēka Chūdamani*.

Bāhyāvalambhanam vruththēh yēshō(u)parathiruthama
(Sloka 23)

Āchāryā refers to the greatest state of uparathi as '*uparathih uththamā*'. '*Bāhyāvalambhanam*' is the attachment to the external things. External does not mean only what is experienced by the actions of the legs, hands etc or to the *jñānēndriyās*. Whatever is other than *āthmā* is all external. That is even the thought which arises in the mind is also external. Thus the mind remains completely freed from all things. It cannot even be said to be 'remaining' because uparathi is like death. Yet it is the state in which awakening to the *āthmā* (*prabhōdham*) has not taken place. If that takes place then it is the state opposite to death which is the state of 'amruth'. Now even though *āthmā* is not realized the mind is calm, almost like being dead.

In Upanishads there will be arguments and counter arguments between two sides. When one side gives clinching arguments and the other side is silenced, that is described as

‘upararāma’. That means the second one reached ‘uparamam’. Uparamam and uparathi are same - becoming incapable of action.

One who attains the state of uparathi is uparathan. In his *bāshyam* on *Bruhadhāraṇyakam* Āchāryā describes uparathan as : ‘*Sarvaishāṇā vinirmukthah sanyāsī*’. *Ēshaṇā* means desire. In the same Upanishad in another place it is said that the *jñāni* gives up all kinds of *Ēshaṇā* and roams about like a beggar. Generally, there are three desires - *puthra ēshaṇā*, *thāra ēshaṇā* and *viththa ēshaṇā* - which are together called ‘*Ēshaṇā thrayam*’. In (*Lalithā*) *Thrisadhi Ambāl* has the name ‘*Eshaṇā rahithā dhruthā*’. It means She is worshipped by those who are devoid of desires. *Vairāgyam* also is desirelessness. But in that stage the disgust for objects of enjoyment is prominent. But in Uparathi there is neither disgust nor desire.

Since desires are completely absent, Āchāryā calls this itself (uparathi) as *sanyāsam* in his *bāshyam* on *Bruhadāraṇyaka* Upanishad. He calls the uparathan a *sanyāsī*. There are three more in the shadgam - *thithikshai*, *sraddhā* and *samādhānam*. It is only after these three, one attains Mumukshuthvam (the keenness to attain *mōksham*) and when he becomes ripe in this it is *sanyāsam*. Why then has Āchāryā brought in *sanyāsam*? As I told earlier, it is not necessary that in *Sāadhanā* one step should follow only when the previous one ends. They are practiced in a mixed way. I have said that when one becomes fully matured in *vairāgyam* he can take *sanyāsam*. Therefore Āchāryā must have thought that if one is firmly established in uparathi it is *sanyāsam*. Since the direct meaning of *sanyāsī* is ‘one who has renounced everything’ he must have called the uparathan as *sanyāsī*. In *thithikshai*, *sraddhā* and *samādhānam* which are to follow the aspect of renouncing is not there.

Āchāryā who has given the *Sādhana* Chathushtayam in the very beginning in *Vivēka Chūdāmaṇi*, talks much later of *vivēkam*,

vairāgyam and *uparathi*. It may be thought why he says these after one has taken *sanyāsam* and is going to the highest stage of *Sādhana*. Each of these will get ripened step by step and attain fullness. That is why he talks of *vivēkam* and *vairāgyam* (which have been spoken of in the beginning itself) again and says that it is due to the extra development of these the mind gets purified and becomes fit for *Mukthi*. Further on he says '*Vairāgyān na param sukasya janakam paschyāmi vaśyāthmanah*' - I have not known anything else more enjoyable than *vairāgyam* to a yathi who has controlled his mind'. Similarly he has shown the fullness of *uparathi* by saying that it is *vairāgyam* to *bhōdam* (*jnāna*) and from *bhōdham* to *uparathi*.

If the mind rests in the early *uparathi* stage, will it end in nothingness? No. Even if it is like that for that time, the grace of *Īśwarā* will not leave it at that. When one has controlled all desires in order to know what 'Brahma Sathyam' is will *Īśwarā* allow his state to end there? But at the same time He will not also grant him *sākshāthkāram*. He will grant it only when all the *karmā* of the jiva gets destroyed. Before that time arrives he will make the state of mere *uparathi* attain the state of *samādhānam* for him to become more qualified to receive the *Upadēsam* of *Mahā Vākyam*. Then it will be taking *sanyāsam*, receiving *Upadēsam* - thus the *sādhana* goes on.

In between *uparathi* and *Samādhānam* the two, namely, *thithikshai* and *śraddhā*, are mentioned.

* * *

THITHIKSHAI

Thithikshai means patience, endurance, forbearance. When it is said that it is 'next to *uparathi*' it should not be understood that it is after attaining *siddhi* in *uparathi*. Since several

qualifications are necessary, *Āchāryā* has given them as parts of *Sāadhanā*. As far as possible he has given them in the order in which the development should take place - starting from *vivēkam* about *nithyānithya* vasthu and upto *mumukshuthvam*. But even in the beginning everything including *mumukshuthvam* should be practiced a little. Even at the stage in which each one of them is practiced with greater emphasis all the others also will come along with it or within it.

Another thing is that when several limbs like *vivēkam*, *vairāgyam* and *śamam* are mentioned it will not be that one will attain full *siddhi* in any one of them till the final *sākshāthkāram* is attained. In each one, there will be something less, a step below the *pūrñathva*. Because if it is total *siddhi* in any one of them it will make all others also attain total *siddhi* and reach one to the *siddhi* of *sākshāthkāram*.

All the *sāadhanā* is for the mind to become completely pure and then finally to get destroyed. The mind getting destroyed means the destruction of the desires. Only when *sākshāthkāram* materializes, the taste for the objects of enjoyment will get destroyed immediately. That is what *Gītā* says clearly. 'If one denies the food that is appropriate to each sense organ, by that practice the enjoyment of the external objects will stop.' Yet the taste of having experienced it will continue to be there inside. *Bhagawān* says that this will go when the *sākshāthkāram* of *āthmā* is achieved.

Vishayā vinivarthanthē nirāhārasya dhēhinah

Rasavarjam raso(a)pyasya param dhrushtvā nivarthathē

(II-59)

Param dhrushtva - only after seeing Paraman, after experiencing the Supreme truth.

Rasaha api nivarthathē - the taste of experience will also get destroyed.

On the one side it is said that only when taste for the objects of enjoyment goes and the mind is destroyed the experience of the ultimate truth will materialize. On the other it is said that only if this experience comes, the taste will go. This looks like being contradictory. It is not so. He has to make all efforts in the name of *Sādhana* to destroy taste and the mind and have *āthmā* dharsanam (Self realization). Still he will not be able to destroy completely. It is at that time when he has made efforts fully *Īśwarā* with great compassion gives him the experience of the Self (*āthmanubhavam*) and by that destroys the taste and the mind that goes after taste. If he can achieve anything by his own *Sādhana*, what is great about *Īśwarā*'s grace? Therefore it means that till the end he has to practice all the parts of the *Sādhana* without his attaining fullness by himself.

On the whole, going through practicing the different parts of spiritual practice is like studying all the subjects together till the time of examination and then concentrating on each of them during the examination, passing in each of them and passing in the overall.

It is only for making things clear in the beginning they have been given as if they are one after the other. It is like the swaras that are taught in the order Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni in the beginning. But once music is learned and when singing a song or doing '*ālāphana*', the swaras are mixed in different orders.

Supposing it is thought that *thithikshai* has to be practiced only after the mind has given up all attachments in *uparathi*, the question will arise, 'the mind has already become like a log of wood. What is there for being patient about? Is it not like asking a person who is asleep to be patient?' But here the example of studying all the subjects together should not be forgotten.

If *uparathi* has been practiced with success the mind will be detached instead of being affected by the joys and sorrows that

occur normally. But if the joys and sorrows are subnormal or abnormal the uparathi state will be disturbed and mind is likely to be affected. It is in view of such a stage, *Āchāryā* - and the Upanishads before him - have prescribed 'thithikshasva' - be patient.

We use the word '*sīthōshnam*'. It is formed by the combination of '*sītham*' and '*ushnām*'. *Sītham* is cold. *Ushnām* is heat. This is a pair of opposites. (Dhwandhwam). Suka - dhukka is similar. *Bhagawān* tells Arjuna 'accept suka dhukka patiently'.

In several places in *Gītā*, *Bhagawān* speaks of several dwandhwams like this. 'You be one who has transcended the pairs of opposites '*Dwandwādhīnan*'. Whether the purpose is achieved or not (siddhi - asiddhi) remain balanced' (IV-22). To remain balanced also means to be patient, to tolerate. The siddhi-asiddhi pair is mentioned again in the last chapter also. Siddhi-asiddhi refer to victory or defeat : *Sidhyasidhyhōr nirvikārah karthā sāthvika uchyathē* (XVIII-26). He who remains unaffected (unchanged) in victory and defeat is called a '*sāthvika*'.

Bhagawān refers to '*sīthōshnam*' and '*suka-dhukkam*' again in the *Upadēśam* of *Dhyana Yōgam* and adds another pair of opposites - '*mānāpamānayōh*' - honour and dishonour. He has referred in several places to '*sūbha - aśubha*'. The puṇya-papa pair is referred to as *subha-aśubha*. Priyam-apriyam, ishtam-anishtam, *lābham-alābham*, jayam-ajayam - pairs of opposites like these are mentioned in several places and He says that in all these one should remain balanced.

Of these one should get used to tolerating what appears to be bad and then become unconcerned about them or ignore them. Thithikshai is to be observed in extreme cold, extreme heat, sorrow, dishonour etc. Thithikshai is also necessary in regard to what appears now to be good - mild heat or cold, sukam, honour, *puṇyam*, jayam etc. Otherwise *Bhagawān* would not have spoken

of them as pairs. If it is said that one should remain balanced in regard to both it means that he should be unconcerned about both.

When it is said that what is bad is to be tolerated or to be put up with, it can be understood. But when the same is said about what is good it is difficult to understand it. It sounds funny too! But this will be understood if we succeed in *Sādhana* to an extent. We will find that even what looks good are not necessary. If there is a pleasant breeze and if it is comfortable to the body, we train ourselves to feel 'why do we need this kind of pleasure to the body? Should we not be unconcerned whether it is pleasant breeze or it is a hurricane?' We will start feeling 'why should there be a pleasant breeze like this and why should we be concerned with it and feel the pleasure?' In the same manner if we get money and others start showing love towards us we will feel 'let us be in poverty only. Let not people love us. We are going to tolerate anyway. Why should we behave differently from that now? If we behave like that again there will be the thought about what is good and what is bad. In other words just as we now feel that bad things are not wanted after some progress in *Sādhana*, we will feel that even those which appear good are not wanted. Is not thithikshai tolerating what we do not want in the thought 'let things happen their way'? In that state when we feel that what appears good is not wanted the very thought of 'I do not want this' should be given up and remain unconcerned. That is what is meant by tolerating what is good. Even if we think that we will remain unconcerned about whatever happens, good or bad, because of our previous *karmā* some good things may happen. We may get some money in an unexpected manner. Relatives and friends may come professing love. At such time instead of thinking 'I do not need all this. Without these favourable things, if we are remaining happy even in adverse circumstances then only it will be good for us. Apart from this what appears to be good are those which will drag us into *māyā*. Therefore I do not want them', there is room to tolerate good things, to show thithikshai in good things also.

Āchāryā has defined thithikshai in the same way both in *Vivēka Chūdāmaṇī* and *Aparōkshānubhūthi* : To put up with all sorrows - '*Sarva dhukkānām sahanam*' - But because of this it should not be thought it is only putting up with what appears to be sorrow and does not refer to being unconcerned about pleasure. There is really no pleasure in what we think to be pleasure. It is only *jñānam* which is pleasure. Since all the experiences of the dual world are opposed to that *jñāna* they are all sorrow only. What appears to be sorrow to us will at least make us feel 'enough of this world' and make us turn towards *jñāna*. Enjoyment of pleasure will create a stronger bondage with this world. Therefore what is required is the attitude to look at such things also as sorrow. Then just as we put up with what we think to be sorrow we should remain unconcerned about the sorrow called pleasure. In that stage even pleasure becomes sorrow. That is why Āchāryā has said only '*dhukkānām sahanam*'. The truth we learn from *Gītā* and other *sāsthrās* is that thithikshai is to bear with the dwandhwam - sukam, dhukkam in the same manner.

The mind becomes agitated when something good happens also. That too should not be. Experience of the Self can be had only when the mind becomes quiet. Therefore the turbulence occurring due to good things should also be controlled. In a balance if we assume that on one side it is what is bad and on the other it is what is good, on whichever side there is the weight of good or bad the balance will tilt. Thus not only the weight of emotion due to bad things tilts the state of mind but also the weight of emotion due to good things. Therefore what is good should also be 'borne' without considering it as a weight. That is what is called thithikshai in good things. A certain great harm which is not there in what is bad is in what appears to be good. Since we like the pleasure we derive from what is good the desire to experience it again arises and disturbs

the mind. That desire is called 'sapruhā'. Preventing it from happening is also a form of thithiksha.

'Dukhkēshu Anudhvigmanāh sukēshu vigatha sapruhāh' (II.56)

is what the *Gītā* says.

To keep the mind without distress when there is sorrow and being without 'sapruhāh' when good things happen is thithikshai.

Thithikshai helps in being free from the experiences of all the pairs of opposites. When dwandhwam goes it is the departure of dwaitham. That is Adhwaitham. When dwandham goes the bondage of *samsārā* itself goes and the door of *mōksha* opens.

'Nirdhvandhvō hi mahābhāhō sukham

bhandāth pramuchyathē'

(V-3)

By saying that one who has transcended dwandhwam gets freed from the bondage easily, *Bhagawān* has shown the supreme goal as the final fruit of thithikshai.

To confirm this about thithikshai, *Āchāryā* in his Upanishad *bāshyam* says (about one who has achieved thithikshai) : Thithikshu dhwandhwa *sahishṛuh* - one who remains with forbearance in regard to the pairs of opposites, he is a thithikshu. If what is 'double' goes what remains is 'single'. Is not what is single the *āthmā*?

Whether a thing is really a sorrow and is perceived as such or what appears to be good is in effect sorrow one should be unmindful of both. He should not worry about them and weep over them. Nor should he go in search of the means to prevent such sorrow or good happening. He should just put up with them - this is *Āchāryā's Upadēsam*.

Sahanam sarvadhukkānām aprathikāra pūrvakam

Chinthā vilāpa rahitham sā thithikshā nigadhyathē

(V.C. 24 - 25)

‘*aprathīkāra pūrvakam*’ – ways and means should not be found for countering.

prathīkāram – action to count another.

chinthā vilāpa rahitham – not to worry, not to cry.

sarvadhukkānām sahanam – All sorrows must be accepted with forbearance.

Sā thithikshā nigadhyathē – Instead of saying ‘that is *thithikshā*’ *Āchāryā* has said ‘She is *thithikshai*’.
Thithikshā is feminine.

When speaking of ‘*nithyānithya vasthu vivēkam*’ he says ‘*sōyam nithyānithya vasthu vivēkah*’. ‘He’ – *sō(a)yam sa(a)yam* he says in masculine gender. *Vivēkah* is masculine.

Since usually to think deeply about something and then act is said to be the quality of a male, possibly *vivēka* is said to be male. It is usually said that women are fickle-minded and are wise after the event. Whatever may be the practical position since such a thought and such a saying are there, *vivēkam* must have been classified as masculine.

Vairāgyam, instead of being said *vairāgyah* in the masculine is said *vairāgyam* in neuter gender. Just to highlight it, even when beginning the *ślōkā*, *Āchāryā* says ‘*thath vairāgyam*’ – that is *vairāgyam*. It gives the impression that in *vairāgyam* the mind becomes inert like a jadam.

Vivēka involves a lot of comparative assessment. As a result, the inert state of the mind is important in *vairāgyam* and not much of action. Since for action lot of *pourusham* (vigour) is needed he has used ‘*sah*’ clearly in masculine. What is inert and without action he calls ‘*thath*’ – that.

Āsamam - dhamam are as *sama* and *dhama* in masculine gender. I have said that the direct meaning of both is 'to control', 'to subjugate'. Consistent with this, these words are also in masculine.

After saying what is *samam* he has concluded with 'this is called the *samam* of the mind' - 'manasah *sama* uchyathē'. Only if it is '*samamuchyathē*' (*samam* uchyathē) *samam* will be neuter gender. Since it is *sama* uchyathē, *samah* - *saman* becomes masculine. But just as he has used 'sah' (he) clearly in regard to *vivēkam* he has not used here. Here instead of defining *samah* as 'control of the mind' he says 'the state in which it subsists is its goal' - *swalakshyē niyatha avasthā*. After referring to the masculine function of the mind namely putting down the thoughts he speaks of the peaceful state of the mind subsisting in the goal namely *āthmā*. It is probably because of this he did not want to use a word which will show great vigour and therefore he did not use 'he'.

But when talking of dhamam he says 'sah dhamah *parikīrthithah*' - 'he is praised as 'dhaman'. Thus he emphatically uses the masculine form. Is not a lot of masculine vigour required to pull back the *indriyās* when they cut themselves off and run away?

Uparathi is feminine. If the keen urge to act is masculine should not being actionless be femine? That is why he has said '*uparathiruththamā*' (*uparathi* : *uththamā*) - uparathi who is noble. Only if it is *uththamah* it would mean 'uththaman' in masculine form. *Uththamā* means only a *uththami* - feminine.

Then he has referred to *thithiksha* by 'sa' (she) clearly in feminine. Patience is the greatest quality of women. We refer to *Bhūmādēvi* (feminine deity) as the deity for patience.

* * *

ŚRADDHĀ

Like thithiksha, *Śraddhā* is also a feminine word in Sanskrit. *Śraddhā* is to trust - on the basis of faith and not direct proof - that what *sāsthrās* say or the great ones (*śishtās*) say must be correct and to be fully involved in a thing on that basis. So long as women did not go too much for education and research their position had remained higher in matters of *śraddhā*. Even after they have changed to some extent I think they are still a step higher than men in *śraddhā*. One does not know how this will be in times to come.

I have already said that 'āsthikyam' itself is dependent entirely on *śraddhā*. The non-believers among women may not be even a fourth of the number among men. We see that even the wives of the atheists have not given up temples, tanks, vratham, pūjā etc. Therefore it appears correct that *śraddhā* is treated as feminine.

I have spoken about *śraddhā* in the beginning itself. I have also said that this subject will again come towards the end of *Sāadhanā* when I shall talk more on this. We have now come to that second stage - the higher grade *śraddhā*.

By now one has done several things to attain ripeness in *jñāna*. To enquire into what is permanent and what is not; to develop *vairāgyam* towards what is impermanent; to control the mind which is full of thoughts and keep it free of thoughts; to develop patience - he has made progress in all these. Why then is *śraddhā* being brought in now? Was not *śraddhā* necessary even at the beginning, the foundation stage? In the beginning when there was no soul-related practice there was meaning for laying down *śraddhā* saying 'in this path there are several things which cannot be accepted on the basis of rational thinking or by direct proof; many of these have to be accepted only on the basis of *sāsthrās* and traditions and the guru's words.' If it is asked why it should be brought when the highest stage has been reached to some extent -

it is only to prevent *śraddhā*, the faith being harmed by this very progress to the highest stage!

In the beginning when he was not sure if he would be able to achieve *vivēkam*, *vairāgyam*, indriya nigraham etc he must have had the attitude of humility in the thought 'there must be many things in the spiritual *sāsthrās* and practices which we cannot understand. Why not we accept what is said by *sāsthrās* and great men for our redemption?' Therefore he will be with *śraddhā*. But once he has progressed in the practice he will develop a kind of egoistic feeling of which he himself may not be aware : 'Now all my confusions are cleared. Hereafter I can myself understand whatever is to be done for *sākshāthkāram*'. But really speaking, even at the final state when *sākshāthkāram* materializes, many things will be happening which cannot be intelligible to buddhi. Even the one who has achieved *sākshāthkāram* and has become a *jnāni* will not be able to explain those things at the intellectual level. When whatever has been followed till then continues to be followed without questioning, certain inexplicable things will happen and then *sākshāthkāram* will come up suddenly like the sunrise. Those things are secrets known only to *Parāśakti*. When those things happen, instead of enquiring into them through the intellect he must just remain humbly accepting them. If he remains thinking 'we have progressed this far in the practice. The power of grace which enabled us to do this will not fail to take us further up. As a final test it is doing things in a way that we cannot understand them with buddhi. We should, instead of bringing in buddhi at this stage, accept with faith and belief what is happening and pass the test' there will be final deliverance. Even after deliverance such state will be beyond intellectual enquiry. Even our *Āchāryā - Śankara Bhagavadhpādāhā* - greater than whom there is not and there cannot be an *āchāryā* - has not come forward to disclose that secret in the language of buddhi. He has implied 'I too cannot say

it; keep going on the basis of faith'. That is why he has kept *sraddhā* even after one has advanced in *Sādhana*.

If he had disclosed all the secrets there would have been no need for *Rāmānujāchāryā* to found *Visishtādhvaitham*. Because *Rāmānujar* intellectually raised a question about some aspect of *Adhvaitha Siddhāntham* and he did not get a reply and he felt that he got the reply when he thought differently, he named it *Visishtādhvaitham*. All right. But has that at least disclosed all secrets to all people? No. That is why Madhva had to found *Dwaitha Siddhāntham*. That too has not provided answers to all intellectual queries. That is why we are here as so many Adhvaithis and *Visishtādhvaithis*. We go on debating. On one side we are carrying on intellectual debate but some who came in each of these siddhānthas later, instead of accepting things after testing them intellectually, thought 'we are born like this - a *Smārthā* or *Srī Vaishṇava* or a *Mādhvā*. Let us have the faith that whatever has been said by our *āchāryā* is correct and follow that path', followed that path with faith and attained the highest experience of that path.

A *Smārthā* (one who belongs to the Adhvaitha *sampradhāyam*) may say that the experience of those of the other *sampradhāyās* is of a lower order than the experience of the identity of Jīva-Brahmam. Let him say that. But those who have experienced in other *sampradhāyās* have definitely gone above the majority of the *Smārthās* who do not practice the *Sādhana* with *sraddhā*. Even if they (those of other *sampradhāyās*) may not know the highest state of *Nirguṇa Brahmam* about which the *Smārthās* speak, the same *Nirguṇa Brahmam* is also as *Īśwarā* or *Saguṇa Brahmam*. For those of other siddhānthās some relationship has developed with the *Saguṇa Brahmam* and they have had the experience of *Īśwarā* (*Īśwarānubhavam*). Therefore they themselves have gained divine power, the power of grace and

compassion at heart. They who firmly believe that their *āthmā* is meant only for doing bhakthi to *Paramāthmā* have gone far above those who make an empty claim 'I belong to the Adhvaitha *Sampradhāyā* which is the highest' but know only their body and the run of the mind and nothing about *āthmā*. Is not considering the pure mind which is full of bhakthi as the *āthmā* better than the one who has no experience of the *āthmā* whatever? If the mind becomes pure like that, later it will get destroyed and it will be possible to have *āthmanubhavam*. Leaving aside what will happen later, for those who have followed the *sāsthrās* of their *sampradhāyā* with *śraddhā* and have had experience, a relationship with god, divine power and the power of grace develop. That is why there are several persons in all *sampradhāyās* whom the world praises as great (*mahān*).

At one stage if one progresses on the strength of *śraddhā*, giving up the strength of buddhi, there will be the grace of *Parāśakthi* which will take him to the experience. I wanted to show that therefore *śraddhā* is very necessary at that stage. Even the *Sādhaka* (practitioner) who has had good progress in the spiritual path should continue on the same line in accordance with the *Upadēśa* of his *āchāryā* without questioning. Then only he can achieve the goal. If one questions there will be no reply which will satisfy the buddhi. The *āchāryā* also will not or cannot give reply in a manner that the buddhi can understand it. Since further *Sādhana* has to be carried on, on the basis of *śraddhā* only, *śraddhā* has been kept as part of *Sādhana* again.

Not only in the beginning but till the last, without thinking 'we can know it, we can understand it ourselves' there should be faith : 'Does *Sāsthrām* say like this? Does guru say like this? Let us go on doing according to that. Let us go on, whatever may happen in between. It will, of its own, reach us to the goal'. In his *bāshyam* on *Bṛuhadāraṇyaka* Upanishad *Āchāryā* says '*Śraddhā* is not just

one of the means of the *Sādhana* but it is the highest *upāyam* : *Śraddhā cha brahma vinjānē paramam Sādhanam*. *Bhagawān* also has said emphatically : 'It is only the one with *sraddhā* that attains *jnāna*' : *Śraddhāvān labhathē jnānam* (IV-39).

The Upanishad *manthrās* which speak the *Mahāvākyās* proclaiming the non-difference between *Jīva-Brahmam* are specially great. I have said 'among the *Mahā Vākyās* one *manthrā* enjoys special place of greatness - the *Sāma Vēdhā Vākyam* which is in the form of a guru's *Upadēsam* to a *śishyā*; what was given as *Upadēsam* to a *brahmachāri* and not a *sanyāsi*. That is the *Upadēsam* which *āchāryā* makes to the *śishyā* : 'You the *Jīvātmā* are that, the *Paramātmā* (thou art that). The one who gave the *Upadēsam* was the father, *Uddhālaka Āruṇi*. The one who received the *Upadēsam* was the son *Śwēthakēthu*. The father rishi who goes on telling *manthrā* after *manthrā* and puts the final stamp 'that thou art' tells the son in between 'bring one fruit of the banyan tree'.

The son : 'Here it is *Bhagawān*'.

Father : 'Open it'.

Son : 'I opened it'.

Father : What do you see in the fruit that has been opened?'

'There are atom-like seeds, *Bhagawān*'.

'All right child. Break that seed also'.

'I have broken it *Bhagawān*'.

'What do you see inside?'

'Nothing, *Bhagawān*'

'The subtle thing which cannot be seen is there where you say there is nothing. It is from that the huge banyan tree comes and stands'. The father who said this addresses the son at this point

warmly as 'Sowmya'! and tells him 'Believe what I tell you. That is, have faith - 'Śraddhasva'.

From the fact that when giving *Upadēsam* of *Mahā Vākya* which even the great yathis (*yathīśwarās*) glorify later, to one who was so qualified as to receive the *Upadēsam* it was found necessary to tell him 'śraddhasva' even when giving that *Upadēsam* it is clear that till actual experience of Brahman (*Brahmānubhavam*) occurs there will be certain things which have to be accepted on the basis of faith.

It is not only belief in what is being said; it is also the faith that through the guru who gives that *Upadēsam* the door will certainly open for him. This is important. Even if the guru is a *jnāni* he may have to act as ordinary humans in several ways - like what the *avathārs* of *Īśvarā* do. That also would only be with the object of showing the path to someone. But when he acts like the humans the *śishyā* himself may develop a doubt about him. If he thinks 'Is this a real *jnāni*? Why then he acts like an ordinary man?' and begins entertaining doubt whether he can get redemption through him, that is the end. That (the doubt) will develop like a huge thing like a *dēvīl*, will invade his mind and will not allow him to do any *Sāadhanā* and also make him feel 'I have deceived myself' and make him miss the goal. That is why *Bhagawān* says 'Samsayāthmā vinasyathi' (iv-40) - one who keeps doubting will perish. It should be noted that first he says 'Asraddhadhānascha samsayāthmā vinasyathi' referring to the one who has lost *śraddhā* and along with that he says 'samsayāthmā'.

In another place He says that the 'asraddhadhānā' (one who has no *śraddhā*) will be circling in the whirlpool of *samsārā* which will lead him to death.

Asraddhadhānāḥ Purushā...Nivarthanthe -

mruthyu samsāra varthmani

(IX - 3)

What *Bhagawān* has said of the one who has no faith has been said differently in Tamil about the one who has faith : 'Those with faith never lose'. But *Bhagawān*, out of compassion, says in a threatening manner because man gives more space for disbelief, lack of faith only. The threat is not a false one. If faith goes what he says will certainly happen. No room should be given to that. One should have the *śraddhā*, faith that 'we have surrendered to a guru. He may be anything by external appearance. So far as we are concerned *Īśwarā* will not let us down without granting release'. The *śraddhā*-bhakthi and surrender to the *dīkshā* guru who gives *sanyāsam* is more important than the *vidhyā* guru who teaches in the beginning.

Although one has to go to a guru only after making full enquiries, sometimes one might have got deceived and gone to a spurious guru. Still if, without losing *śraddhā*, he surrenders to him, even if the guru has not attained *jñāna*, *Īśwarā* who dwells in everyone will extend His grace through that guru.

If there will be firm acceptance of something as the truth only by directly knowing it but it will not be so if the same is said by guru on the basis of *sāsthrās* it is not surrender at all. We should have the firm conviction, 'since this is not intelligible to our mean intellect this is greater than what we can ourselves know; it is the truth. It is the great truth which *Īśwarā* Himself revealed to the rishis who are the originators of the *sāsthrās* and they have given them to us'. It is that kind of faith which is called *śraddhā*. There is a *sāsthrā* called 'Niruktham' which goes into the roots of the words in the *Vedhās* and gives meanings. It is one of the six limbs of the *Vedhās*. It was Yāskar who wrote it. When giving meaning to *śraddhā*, he says that it is formed by the two roots 'śrad' and 'dha'. 'dha' means 'to fix'. 'śrad' indicates 'sathyam'. Therefore 'Śraddhā' means to fix the mind on one thing considering that as sathyam. In other words to believe with a firm mind is *Śraddhā*.

There is a *manthrā* in *Chāndōgyam* which says : 'Only if one has such *śraddhā* in the truth about which we have to think deeply in our mind and which we cannot see, he will think about it properly; one who does not have that cannot think in that manner' - correct thinking is there when he has *śraddhā*.

In *Mundakōpanishad* it is said that *upadēsam* of Brahma *Vidhyā* should be given only to those who have *śraddhā*. When indicating who are fit to receive that *vidhyā* it says that those who do *karmānushtāna*, those who are Vedhic scholars (*srōthriya*), those who have the thirst to be permanently in Brahman, those who have *śraddhā*. In *Praśnōpanishad* also it is said that those who are in search of the *āthmā* become fit for that by *thapas*, *brahmacharyam* and *śraddhā*.

After explaining the divine and *asurā* qualities *Bhagawān* says 'There is no *siddhi* for one who violates the rules of *sāsthrā*, no happiness and no salvation. Therefore, Arjuna! work out your way on the strength of the *sāsthrās*' (XVI - 23-24). In the beginning of the next chapter He says that even without the *sāsthrās* there could be *śraddhā* of some kind as a result of one's in-born qualities and that even in such *śraddhā* which is not based on *sāsthrās* there is a type which is 'sathva', not only *rājās* and *thamas* (XVII-2). From this we understand the pride of place accorded to *śraddhā* and the greatness it enjoys.

All through, *Āchāryā* keeps emphasizing the importance of faith in *sāsthrās* and the *Upadēsa* of the guru. In the order of *Sāadhanā* in 'Samādhi Shadga Sampaththi' *Āchāryā* has added *śraddhā* as the sixth along with *samam*, *dhamam*, *uparathi*, *thithikshai* and *samādhānam*. But without keeping it as the sixth after the fifth he has kept *samam*, *dhamam*, *uparathi* and *thithikshai* in the order in which they are given in *Bṛuhadāraṇyakam* and added *śraddhā* as the fifth after *thithikshai* and ended it with *samādhānam*.

One of the meanings of *samādhānam* is to establish what is true after clearing all doubts. If a certain doctrine is put forth by one religionist, another religionist will argue against it. This is called '*Pūrvapaksham*'. Then the first one will answer all the objections and establish his doctrine which is called '*siddhāntham*'. When objections are raised by the other religionists in the form of *Pūrvapaksham* even the *śishyās* of the first religionist may think about him in this manner : 'Is his side perhaps wrong? Probably, the other person who raises *Pūrvapaksham* is right'. Is this not also a form of lack of faith? That kind of '*āsraddhā*' is removed by what the guru says as '*samādhānam*'.

When *Āchāryā* gives *śraddhā* as a limb of *Sādhana*, *āsraddhā* also becomes a part of it! When we tell something to someone and add 'Do not have any doubt about this', even those who did not have doubt till then will start thinking about it! *Śraddhā* has inevitably *āsraddhā* as its opposite. *Śraddhā* is that limb of *Sādhana* by which *āsraddhā* is fought and won. After the victory over *āsraddhā*, to remain at peace is '*samādhānam*'! When fight ends it is peace. 'War and peace' is what we generally say.

Śraddhā is in the stage in which there is room for belief (faith) to fight against non-belief. After that it is *samādhānam* - settling down without fight. If this is put in a different way, before *samādhānam* it is *śraddhā*.

When *Āchāryā* thought that it would be better if *śraddhā* which should be there basically from the beginning is also kept as a limb of *Sādhana* in the 'higher grade' he also felt that it will be appropriate if *śraddhā* is kept before *samādhānam* in which the mind firmly settles down before *sanyāsa dhīkshai*, and has put it after *sama*, *dhama*, *uparathi*, *thithikshai*, *Shadga Sampaththi*.

Āchāryā has described the characteristics of *śraddhā* like this :

Sāsthrasya Guruvākyasya sathya budhy(a) vadhāraṇā
Sā śraddhā kathithā sadhbir-yayā vathūpalabhyathe

(V. C. 25 and 26)

The wise and the eminent have said that *śraddhā* is to conclude firmly through buddhi that *sāsthrā* and the words of guru are the truth (sathyam). It means that it is by this *śraddhā* that the Supreme Reality is attained.

Āchāryā says that he does not say this on his own authority but he says with humility that he is only saying what the great ones have already spoken.

What is said generally is that *śraddhā* is accepting something on the basis of faith without intellectual exercise. But here it is said that *śraddhā* is concluding through the intellect that *sāsthrās* and the words of guru are sathyam. But this does not contradict what is said generally because 'concluding with intellect' does not mean 'analysing through buddhi whether *sāsthrās* and the guru's words are correct and accept them only if they are correct. But the buddhi itself should feel 'we cannot know anything; we cannot judge anything; what we cannot understand about *āthmā* and the other world if *sāsthrājnās* and the guru have known through their '*jñāna dhrushti*' (supernatural vision) we should accept what they say without doing research' and come to a firm conclusion. This is what is called the '*Avathāraṇam*' of the buddhi. It is not that buddhi confirms the truth on its own; it is buddhi firmly concluding that it has no work here.

This is not like someone who is not intelligent accepting anything. If that was so he may feel cheated. When the beginning itself is '*nithyā nithya vathu vivekam*' it means the rational analysis of the good and the bad. That is possible only if one is intellectually sound. He has to develop his intellect and keep it sharp and alert to properly judge those things which can be judged

by the intellect. But when the *sāstharās* and the guru say something which his intellect by itself cannot understand he must be firm in the thought 'here there is no work for buddhi. I should accept the *Upadēsam* as it is given'. Not to exhibit the power of his intellect is more difficult than exhibiting it! That will be possible only if there is utmost humility. By developing such humility and instead of having the faith of the ignoramus to have the faith of an intelligent person and accepting the *sāsthrās* and the words of guru without questioning is *śraddhā*.

One meaning of '*avathāraṇam*' is 'deep conviction'. Another meaning is 'to limit'. We can take the two meanings together. We can take it that the buddhi remaining firm in the faith that *sāsthrās* and the words of the guru are sathyam with the feeling that it is beyond its own limit and thus limiting itself to *śraddhā*.

By saying '*yayā vasthu upalabhyathē*' he means that it is only through *śraddhā* that the ultimate truth (sathyam) can be attained. '*Yayā*' - by whom (in feminine); *śraddhā* is classified as feminine. *Upalabhyathē* means 'will be attained'. She through whom the truth can be attained is *śraddhā*.

We use the word '*vāsthavam*'. We use this to mean 'nijam'. But the real meaning of 'nijam' is not what we think it to be. We use it in the sense of something being true, sathyam. But its meaning is 'to be in its own nature', 'to belong to itself'.

I think of a reason why then we have this usage. When someone has a make-up he is not natural but is artificial. If the make up goes he becomes natural, that is he becomes 'nijam'. When we say that something is mere 'make up' we mean that it is false. If make-up is false then what is opposite to it, namely, 'nijam' is 'true' and it is another word for 'sathyam'.

I mentioned about '*vāsthavam*'. We understand it to be the truthful thing. That is all right. That word is derived from 'vasthu'.

That which is the quality of a 'vasthu' is 'vāsthavam'. Although we may rightly understand vasthu as a thing, its important meaning is 'one which is sathyam'. Since things are not just imaginary but are really there they too came to be called 'vasthu'. Since 'vasthu' is what is 'sathyam' whatever is true we call 'vāsthavam'.

In the *ślōkā* we are considering it is said that it is only through *śraddhā* that the 'ultimate truth' (Brahmam) is attained - Yayā vasthu *upalabhyathe*. Although we call all things which are not imaginary as vasthu when *jnāna* dawns all these will be seen to be imagination through *māyā*. What will stand out as 'sath', the only true thing is Brahmam. Since *śraddhā* is very necessary to attain it, it has been said that it is only through *śraddhā* it is attained.

Here, he has said that the buddhi, realizing its limitation, remaining firm in the faith that the *sāsthrās* and the words of the guru are sathyam is *śraddhā*. But while defining it in *Aparokshānubhūthi* without giving room for us to interpret the function of the mind intelligently or foolishly he has given a simple definition on the lines of what is generally thought :

Nikam(ā)chārya vākyēshu bhakthih śraddhethi visruthā

The meaning is that to show bhakthi to the words of *Vedhās* and *Sāsthrās*, called 'Nikamam' is called *śraddhā*. Bhakthi means to have faith with love and remain involved in a thing.

It is usual to talk of 'bhakthi - *śraddhā*'. We say like this by taking bhakthi to mean the aspect of love and *śraddhā* to mean the aspect of faith. But we will develop faith in something only when there is love towards it. Only if something is trust-worthy then we will develop love towards it. Since the two - bhakthi and *śraddhā* - are inseperable it would mean that both are the same. Here he says that the faith with love in the *sāsthrās* and the *Upadēsam* or love with faith is *śraddhā*. Love makes our heart get involved in

something. Thus being whole-heartedly involved in the teachings of *sāsthrās* and the guru is *śraddhā*.

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SAMĀDHĀNAM

Samādhānam has been mentioned after '*śraddhā*' and this is the sixth in the *Samādhi* Shadga Sampaththi. Both *Samādhi* and *Samādhānam* have the same meaning. The six spiritual wealths - *samam* etc. - end in *samādhi*. Yet

Samādhi is the state of the ultimate goal in which to be united with the Brahman. Therefore it is not a state which will come before one does *Sādhana*. It is the stage of the fruition of *Sāadhanā*. Therefore *Āchāryā* has not mentioned it even in the second stage which is *Sādhana* Chathushtayam. In the third stage also he has not mentioned it along with '*Śravaṇam, Mananam* and *Nidhidhyāsanam*' which are to be practiced after taking *sanyāsam*. It is the fruit of doing all these *Sāadhanā*. In the state of *samādhi* one will continue to remain experiencing it and will not do any *Sāadhanā* by his effort. He cannot do either; there is no need for it too! Therefore *Āchāryā* has not mentioned *samādhi* as a part of the process of *sāadhanā*. Even so

There are two grades in *śraddhā* just as there are two grades in bhakti. The *samādhi* which I mentioned is of the higher grade and another which is similar is lower grade. It is this lower grade *samādhi* which *Āchāryā* has mentioned as *samādhānam* as the last of '*samādhi sampaththi*'. Since *samādhi* will be usually understood as being merged with the goal, in order to make a distinction he has given the name *samādhānam*.

I have said that *Āchāryā* added *śraddhā* to the five things which *Yājñavalkya* Maharishi has said in *Bṛuhadhāranyakam* and has given them as six kinds of wealth. *Yājñavalkya* refers to those

with the five as *sānthan*, *dhānthan*, *uparathan* etc. *Āchāryā* refers to their characteristics as *sama*, *dhama*, *uparathi* etc as limbs of the *Sādhana*. Yājñavalkya calls the last person as 'samāhithan'. The characteristics by which he becomes 'samāhithan', *Āchāryā* calls *samādhānam*. *Samā* plus *āhitha* is equal to *samāhitha*. *Samā* plus *ādhana* is equal to *samādhāna*. Both *āhitha* and *ādhana* have the same meaning - to take one to a place and keep it there permanently and firmly.

You must have heard of '*Āhithāgni*'. There are those who proudly claim to belong to the '*Āhithāgni*' *vamsam*. One who has protected the holy-fire in his house by regularly feeding the *kundam* is '*Āhithāgni*'. The fire ritual which a *brahmachāri* does every day is called *Samidhādhānam*. *Samid* plus *ādhana* is *Samidhādhānam*. He keeps the 'samid', the twigs, in the *kuṇḍam*. To collect and keep, to take and place in something is '*ādhānam*'. By practicing *samādhānam* what does the *samāhithan* collect and keep and where? *Samādhānam* is *Sama ādhanam*. What is that '*Sama ādhānam*'?

All of us know that 'samam' means 'equal', without ups and downs. There are other meanings also. *Samadhānam* means for one to gather the mind fully and keep it at one place. It should be so kept that it does not move even a bit this side or that. The mind thinks of several things at one and the same time. It should be made to remain concentrated. That is '*sama ādhanam*'. One who gathers his mind and keeps it concentrated on one thing is a *Samāhithan*. When he does this there will be the state in which there is no agitation and it is called '*sānathi*'.

If it is said that it should be fixed on one what is that one?

'Śuddhe Brahmanī'

In the pure Brahman which is not mixed with anything.

Samādhānam is to keep the mind on the Brahman all the time. *Āchāryā* has defined it like this :

Samyag āsthāpanam buddhē suddhē Brahmanī sarvadhā
Thath *samādhānam* ithyuktham.

‘Samyag’ means ‘completely’ or ‘wholly’. Here we have to take both the meanings. ‘*Āsthāpanam*’ means ‘to establish’ (*sthāpanam*). The state of keeping the buddhi fixed on the Brahman all the time wholly and constantly is *samādhānam*. ‘Ithyuktham’ means ‘Ithi yuktham’ - ‘being said’.

It is only Brahman which is not mixed with *māyā*. That principle which we call Brahman in the context of its being the support of the entire universe is called ‘*ātmā*’ when it is referred to as the support of the *jīvā*. Only the Brahman which is *ātmā* is not mixed with *māyā*. That is why it is said to be ‘*Śuddhē Brahmanī*’ - Brahman which is pure. Even *Īśvarā* is mixed with *māyā*. *Īśvarā* who is with *māyā* is the one who controls the world which is fully mixed with *māyā*. Brahman does not control. It does not know anything of the world. Even though it is the support of the world except that the *māyā* created from it the show of the world it has no connection with the world.

Semi darkness shows a rope as a snake. When semi darkness creates the appearance of a snake on the substratum of the rope, does the rope have real connection with the snake? Rope is unmixed and remains as rope.

Since Brahman is like that - pure and unmixed - it is called *Śuddha Brahman*.

Samādhānam is to fix the mind concentrated on the *Nirguṇa* Brahman and not *Īśvarā* who is *Saguṇamūrthi*.

What is being practiced is ‘*Ātma Sāadhanā*’. It is for experiencing the qualityless principle of *ātmā*, Brahman.

Therefore is it not necessary to fix the mind on Brahman which is without *māyā* and not *Īśvarā* who is with *Māyā*?

Īśvarā means all deities. In the beginning concentration of mind was achieved by the worship of one such *Mūrthi*. Now in the second stage the mind should be kept fixed on the formless Brahman.

The thought of *Saguṇa Īśvarā* will not fail to come now and then. Even if it comes, instead of thinking of him as the controller of *māyā* lokam we should think 'He is the form of grace who has given us the buddhi to go to *jnāna* from *māyā*. When He himself shows the way of *jnāna* which will reach us to the *Nirguṇa* we should not here after stick to him, the *Saguṇa*'. Thus the chiththa, should be turned to the principle of *āthmā*. Is He not the one who is our *āthmā* also? Therefore the mind should be turned only to *Sādhana* for *Nirguṇa* in the thought 'by holding to *āthmā* let it be holding to Him - that is doing bhakthi to Him'.

I have been talking about chiththam. *Āchāryā* has used the word buddhi.

'*Samyag āsthāpanam buddhē*' - Buddhi should be gathered and made to remain steady in Brahman.

Buddhi is an aspect of chiththam. 'Chith' is 'intelligence'. The part in a jiva that is connected with understanding is chiththam. This is an internal part. It is called *anthahkaraṇam*. Here 'understanding' is not only what is done with intellect. Although this is also included in 'understanding' chiththam is not only that. The feelings that arise in the mind are also in that. The function of the mind, the function of the buddhi - the mind thinks and feels - buddhi understands - all this together make 'chiththam'. Since it is a combination of both for purifying the mind and buddhi and keeping them fixed on one thing it is called the purification of chiththa and the concentration of chiththa.

Anthahkaraṇam which is internal consists of chiththam, mind, buddhi and *ahankāra* (ego).

Thought which is common to all the four has for its source the chiththam. The chiththam which thinks joins with the other three. Mind is the tool for awareness. It does not know what is good or bad. Buddhi only has the power to judge the good and the bad. Ahankāram (ego) is the 'I' which is the origin of all thoughts. The thought of feeling separate from *Paramāthmā* with the feeling of 'I' is ego. It is only when it gets destroyed the state of being a separate *jīvā* - *jīvāthmā* - will go and *āthmā* can be realized and be as *Paramāthmā*. The destruction of ahankāram is the top-most in *sādhana*.

When describing the characteristics of *samādhānam* Āchāryā says that when chiththam is buddhi with the power to judge that buddhi should be made to remain in Brahman.

Usually, chiththam is thought to be the mind. In the same manner, it is usually said that it is the mind which has to be controlled and *samādhānam* created. The 'karthā' who performs a *karmā* will pray to the Brahmins who conduct the *karmā* 'Manas samādhīyathām' - keep the mind in the state of *samādhānam*, that is quiet and subdued'. They will reply saying 'Samāhitha manasāh smah' - 'we will be like that'. It should be noted that when the karthā says 'samādhi' the Brahmins say 'samāhitha' in the same meaning. It should be noted that here too it is the *samādhi* of the mind or the 'samāhitha' state. This is because generally the mind is given importance to the extent of treating it as the *anthahkaraṇam*. We talk of controlling the mind. It has been the practice to talk of spiritual *Sādhana* relating to the mind. This is because it is the mind which pulls the *jīvā* in different directions by a variety of emotions. When talking of *samam* in the 'shadgam' he has defined it as 'the state of the mind being kept subdued in the goal relating to *āthmā*' : 'Swalakshyē niyathavasthā manasah sama uchchyathē'.

Here (in talking of *Samādhānam*) he says that buddhi is to be steadied. You must have heard such statements as 'the mind should be steady', 'mind should be controlled and kept fixed on one thing' etc. If it is said that buddhi should be handled that way it may look odd. Therefore instead of telling mind or buddhi I have been talking of chiththam which is common for both. I said like that because *Āchāryā* himself has shown the way for it. In *Aparōkshānubhūthi* while giving the characteristics of *samādhānam*, he says 'keeping the chiththam concentrated on the goal which is the ultimate reality is *samādhānam*'.

Chiththaikāgryam thu sallakshye

Samādhānamithi smrutham

Now let us see why *Āchāryā* has talked about buddhi here. Earlier he spoke of *śraddhā*. Since the general view is that buddhi has no role in *śraddhā* and it is blind faith buddhi has been excluded there. Although faith is the function of the mind we have seen that *Āchāryā* has said that *śraddhā* is buddhi remaining firm. We have also explained that what *Āchāryā* says is : 'Buddhi makes it firm that it has no work here' and accepts the *sāsthrās* and the words of the guru.

Continuing it he now says that gathering the buddhi and keeping it steadily fixed in Brahman is *samādhānam*. The buddhi should be released from the activity of judging so many things of the world and fixed only on Brahman. This, he says, is *samādhānam*. It is not that only feelings wander on all sides. The faculty of knowing also wanders but generally we consider only the wandering of the feelings as bad and not that of the faculty of knowing. We even glorify the pursuit of knowledge by which to gather knowledge of many things. We say 'one has to know all things; *Āchāryā* himself received the title of 'Sarvajna'. I have myself been saying like this and prodding people. But all these are not for one who advances in the second stage of spiritual *Sādhana*

but for the one in the stage much before that. Only if at that earlier stage the buddhi gains experience in several fields and by that gets sharpened later when taking up the spiritual learning (*Adhyāthma vidhyā*) it will be possible to achieve '*nithyā nithya vasthu vivekam*'. This '*vasthu vivechanam*' is the function of the buddhi. But later one who has become '*āthma Sādhaka*' needs to gain no other knowledge. He needs only 'Self knowledge'. He should control the buddhi and make it remain fixed on the pure Brahman only.

Bhagawān has clearly said in *Gītā* '*Yathēndhriya Mano Buddhi*' (v-28) - not only the *indriyās* and the mind but buddhi also should be controlled. It should be prevented from running after many things and made to remain fixed on Brahman only. *Āchāryā* refers to this as '*Brahmaṇi buddhē sthāpanam*'. But in Upanishads it is said that the *āthmā* cannot be reached by the intellect and through the power of buddhi. In two Upanishads it has been stated emphatically. It is well known that *āthmā* cannot be attained through mind, speech or buddhi.

If it is asked why then *Āchāryā* has said like this the answer is that he does not refer to the final state of *samādhi*. It should be remembered that it is only to show the stage which is lower than that he has talked of *samādhānam* separately.

In the two Upanishads in which it is said that the *āthmā* cannot be attained by the one who is highly intellectual or learned well in *Vedhās* it is also said how else it should be attained. It says that the way to attain it is to 'select' it. (*do Varāṇam*).

We use the word '*varan*' in the context of choosing a bridegroom. *Varan* means one who is eminent. 'Best' is another meaning. It means one who has been selected from out of many. This meaning is clear from the word '*swayamvaram*' - a princess choosing one out of many princes gathered. That is *Varāṇam*.

Choosing the right guru and going to him is '*guru varaṇa*'. Selecting a good *śishyā* is '*śishyā Varaṇam*'.

By excluding all other things and choosing only the *ātmā* and telling it 'You make yourself known to me. Although you are I myself I do not know it. I am unable to know you by the buddhi, mind and speech. Therefore you have to announce yourself to me'. If one goes on praying like this one day suddenly it will be known. It will destroy his buddhi, mind and speech and make him experience the 'Self'.

What the *ātmā* does in return for the '*Varaṇam*' has been described as '*vīvaraṇam*' in Upanishad. *Vīvaraṇa* is to show what is inside, to open what is closed - what is called 'revelation'.

Therefore what the *sādhakā* should do is to realise that all his intellectual prowess will be of no avail with the Brahman, reject everything else and select that only and pray to it. According to *Āchāryā's* *bāshyam* *Varaṇam* includes praying.

If *Āchāryā* says here 'keep the buddhi established in Brahman' what does it mean? It means 'instead of being in the Brahman itself the buddhi must remain concentrated on all that has been said in *Vēdhānthā Sāsthrā* and the guru's *upadēsam*'. That is how I understand it.

Making the buddhi to get immersed in Brahman is at the end of the final stage. That is *samādhi*. Here it is *Samadhānam*. Hence '*Brahmaṇi*' must be understood as matters connected with Brahman - that is in what the *sāsthrās* and the guru say about it. It should be understood that buddhi should be all the time directed towards the philosophical truths of Brahma *Vidhyā*.

In continuation, retaining in buddhi firmly and with faith what *sāsthrās* and the guru say in the practice of *śraddhā*, as its logical conclusion '*adhyāthma sāsthrā*' should be learned with

faith through buddhi and without raising questions with buddhi. Guru may tell certain things which are not in the *sāsthrās* and those should also be learned together.

Experiencing of Brahman (Brahma *Sākshāthkāram*) will materialize later. Only that is real Brahman *Jñānam*. Now buddhi should know whatever can be known in that as *jñāna*. Buddhi should be fully concentrated for gaining that knowledge only. 'Samyakth āsthāpanam' should be done all the time. This is the *samādhānam* of the buddhi.

Now he has not become matured enough to sit for *Dhyānam* which will make the buddhi get dissolved in the *ātmā*. At this stage buddhi will be functioning. But with its aid what is good for spiritual development should only be done. That activity will only be learning well the matters connected with '*āthma sāsthrā*'. Only the *Upadēsam* of '*Mahā Vākya*' should be received in the formal way along with *sanyāsam*. All other things should be studied and learnt through a guru. He is '*Vidhyā Guru*'. But one who initiates into *sanyāsam* later is '*Āśrama Guru*'. There is no need to mention that he must be a *sanyāsi*. He too could be the *Vidhyā Guru*.

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WHO IS ENTITLED TO FORMALLY LEARN UPANISHAD?

There is a view that only the *sanyāsi* is entitled to have to the Upanishad *Vidhyā*. It means that only a guru who is a *sanyāsi* should give *Upadēsam* of the Upanishad to *śiṣhyās* who are also *sanyāsis*. *Brahmachāris* and *gruhashtas* can learn all other books connected with metaphysics.

When a *brahmachāri* learns (does *adhyayana*) of a *Vēdhā sākā* fully he learns also the Upanishad. Many of the *vidhyā* and *Upāsana* in that are intended only for *gruhashtas*. Even then others can do only *adhyayana* without knowing, its meaning or knowing just an outline of it; those who are of the view mentioned above say

that only the *sanyāsi* is entitled to analyse it deeply and know the meaning.

But, since over a long period of time in the tradition of *sishtās* (men of great virtue), *brahmachāris* and *gruhashthās* have been making deep study of the Upanishads, it appears that it should be correct to say that the *sanyāsis* are exclusively entitled to have *Upadēsam* of only the *Mahā Vākya*s.

When doing *adhyayana* of Upanishads, *Mahā Vākya* will be part of it. But, to practice it as a *japa* it is only the *sanyāsi* who is entitled. Therefore he must receive *dikshai* only from a *sanyāsi* guru in respect of the (*Mahā Vākya*) *manthrās*.

Otherwise, over a long period it has been in the practice of 'sāsthrajnas' that all those who are entitled to *Vēdha Vidhyā* can learn the Upanishads through a guru irrespective of their āśrama. Although the fact that in olden times those who gave *Upadēsam* of Upanishads and those who received it were mostly not *sanyāsis* is supportive of this view I am not going to deal with that point. This is because there are what are called 'yuga dharmas' which change from yugam to yugam. Since the spiritual strength of the people of earlier yugas is not there for those of later yugas *Dharma Sāsthrās* say that what happened in an earlier yuga is not applicable to a later yuga. We should not violate that mandate of the *smruthi*. Therefore there is no point in saying that because something was in practice in the times of the Upanishads that can be practiced now. It is true that there is no mandate in *smruthi* that only a *sanyāsi* is entitled to Upanishad *vidhyā*. Still since these days there are those who talk of 'rights' and question the practices of the *Vēdhic* and *Purānā* times and say that they can take up anything, I do not want to bring in the practice of the olden times in support of what is happening now. That the right to Upanishad *vidhyā* has been given to people of all the four *āśramās* in the practices of the 'sishtās' is sufficient authority for us.

It is the traditional practice to recite certain *manthrās* like 'Sānthi pātam' at the beginning and conclusion of Upanishad Pārayaṇam. The *manthrā* recited at the beginning says 'one who created Brahma and gave him the *Vēdhās* is the Supreme One who illumines our buddhi with *jnāna*; I, a Mumukshu surrender unto him'. The advanced practitioner whose goal is *mōksham* is called a Mumukshu. 'Swēthāswatharōpanishad', although not one of the well-known ten Upanishads for which *Āchāryā* has written *bāshyam* he has quoted from it. In the last chapter it is said that *Śwēthāswathara rishi* gave *Upadēsam* of the same to 'adhyāśramis'. *Adhyāśrama* is *sanyāsam* or *ādhivarnāśrama* dharma which is above it. It is on the basis of such material it is said 'ordinary people and gruhasthas are not entitled to upanishads'. But *Āchāryā* has said that several things in the upanishads are for those who are dull indicating that they are meant for our times too. One who is dull is certainly not a Mumukshu. He is the ordinary gruhastha or brahmachāri. On the whole rather than saying that Upanishads can be learnt only after attaining *jnāna* to some extent, in the tradition of *sishtās* it has been relaxed and considered that it is only by learning Upanishads one will gain *jnāna* to some extent.

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STRICTNESS IN SAMĀDHĀNAM

Samādhānam is keeping the buddhi fixed wholly on matters connected with Brahman.

*Samyagāsthāpanam buddheh suddhē Brahmanī sarvadhā
Thath samādhānamithuyuktham na thu chiththasya lālanam*

'Na thu chiththasya lālanam' - *Āchāryā* who referred to buddhi in the beginning of the *ślōkā* refers to chiththa at the end of it. Chiththam is the place of origin of thought which is common to buddhi, mind and *ahankāram*. Therefore depending upon the context it will mean the mind and buddhi. Hence, since chiththa

has been mentioned immediately after saying that buddhi should remain concentrated, we can understand that chiththa is buddhi also or we can understand it to be the instrument which generates thought.

‘Na thu chiththasya lālanam’ means ‘not to be indulgent towards chiththam’. Lālanam is to be indulgent, to pamper - what we do with a child to make it listen to us. Instead of saying that the practitioner has to strictly keep his chiththam on *Nirguṇa Brahman* only even in the beginning is allowed to think of one or even several *Mūrthis* so that he could be turned to the right path by ‘lālanam’. But when he has advanced in his *Sādhana* there should be full stop to all *lālanam* and he must be turned strictly to *Nirguṇa Brahman*. In the first stage there could be relaxation and now when he has advanced in the second stage and is about to become qualified for the third stage of *sanyāsam* there should be no *lālanam* at all and his chiththa must be strictly turned to *Upadesam* of the *Brahma Thathvam* only.

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PARAMĀTHMĀ'S SIX AND JĪVĀTHMĀ'S SIX

Just as *sāsthrās* have laid down six functions for the *gruhastha* (*shadkarma nirāthan*) *Āchāryā* has laid down the six qualities (*shadga sampaththi*) for one who is to take to *sanyāsa āsramam* and do ‘*āthma vichāram*’. But, as I have said earlier, even the *gruhastha* should practice these to the extent he can. Then only he will have happiness and peace in life. One day or the other he will become fit to take to ‘*āthma vichāram*’.

We refer to *Swāmi* (the Lord) as *Bhagawān*. This is because He has in him six things. In *Vishṇu Purāṇam* it is said that because He has six ‘*Bhaga*’ (*sampath*) He is called *Bhagawān*. ‘*Bhaga*’ also means wealth - the wealth of qualities, of power. There are twelve *Sūryās* called *Dwādaśa Ādhityas*. One of them is called ‘*Bhagan*’. The special quality or power which is like the glowing sun is called

Bhagan. *Bhagawān* has six like this. The six are wealth, the power exercised as *Īśwarā* to control, dharma - the dharma is the order he has created in the world, that is He is the personification of order and discipline, then 'yaśas' that is glory, then 'Śrī' (wealth). He is with *vairāgyam* despite all wealth. Sixth - the *Paramāthmā* who has wealth as his first bhagan, discarding the entire world as *māyā*, is in the sixth 'bhagan' of *mōksham* as Brahman. These six are mentioned in *Vishṇu Purāṇām*.

Paramāthmā has six 'bhaga' or 'sampath'. *Jivāthmā* has six sampath, namely, samam etc.

What comes as the last in *Sādhana Chathushtayam* is Mumukshuthvam.

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MUMUKSHUTHVAM

Mumukshu means 'one who desires to have *mōksham*'. One who has that desire fulfilled and achieves '*āthma sākshāthkāram*' is called a *mukthā*. One has to be a mumukshu to become a *mukthā*.

All people may have the desire to have the woes of *samsārā* ended and attain *mōksha*, the state of supreme bliss. Just a desire like this will not mean intense longing (*kāṅkshā*). An intense desire or thirst and the readiness to do all that one can to have the desire fulfilled will only be '*kāṅkshā*'. Only the one who seriously aims at *mōksham* is called a mumukshu. His qualities, how he should be, what he should do etc all together make mumukshuthvam.

*Samsāra bandha nirmukthih katham syāth mē dhayānidhē
Ithi yā sudhrudā buddhir Vakthavyā sā mumukshuthā*

Āchāryā has spoken thus about mumukshuthvam in *Aparōkshānubhūthi*.

He has used words in the manner of the one who is crying before *Īśwarā* or his visible representative namely the guru. He

addresses *Īśvarā*, Guru as '*Dayānidhe*' and asks with distress 'when will I get release from the bondage of *samsārā*?' He is asking with his buddhi remaining firm about securing release. The desire to get released from *samsāram*, born out of disgust because of poverty, ill-health, enmity etc cannot be said to be mumukshuthvam attained with a firm buddhi. Even when one is comfortably placed in life he should feel 'this is also *māyā*. I should get released from this *māyā* and realize the *ātmā* which is the reality'. Then only it will mean firm buddhi. This thirst, this 'mumukshuthā' is in feminine gender. 'yā *Vakthavyā* sā mumukshuthā'.

The meaning of the *śloka* is 'She is 'mumukshuthai' who prays with distress to the *āchāryā* who is dayānidhi for release from *samsāra* with firm buddhi'.

When describing the characteristics of mumukshuthvam in *Viveka Chūdāmani* *Āchāryā* says '*Swa Swarūpa* ava *bhōdēna mōkthum ichchā mumukshutha*'. Mere release from *samsārā* is not enough; it is not enough if the bondage of *samsārā* goes and life becomes something inert like jadam. What is required is '*Swaswarūpa avabhōdam*'. That is, what is required is the enlightenment by which one realizes the *ātmā* which is his true state. More than the desire that *māyā* should go it should be for the experience of the sathyam. That is mumukshuthvam. Release from the bondage of *māyā* is prayed for because it is only when that goes mumukshuthvam will come.

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WHY IS THE ULTIMATE STATE DESCRIBED ONLY AS 'RELEASE'?

But, generally, even the ultimate perfect state has come to be called *mōksham* or *Mukthi* since greater importance has been given to release from bondage than the experience of reality

(*sākhāthkāram*). The words '*mōksham*' or '*Mukthi*' do not describe the state which we attain. They describe only what are given up. The meaning of *mōksha* or *Mukthi* is 'the state of release'. Liberation also means the same thing. There is a root 'much' (in Sanskrit). It has another form also as 'mōch'. They have the meaning 'to get released'. *Mukthi* is a noun derived from 'much'. There is also a noun 'muku' which is not much in use. Mukundan is one who gives 'muku' (release). The nouns derived from 'moch' are '*mōksham*', '*mōchanam*', '*vimōchanam*' etc. Thus all these words refer to the release from the bondage of *samsārā* and not the supreme bliss that is experienced after the release! Why is the final state being referred to only as the release from something? After release we attain something - the *sākhāthkāram* by which we become Brahman itself - why is this not given as the name?

I can think of two reasons. One is there is no word to describe exactly that state of supreme bliss. Another reason is : for the *siddhāntā* of any religion there will be a book of *Sūthras* which is the authority. In that all the principles of that *siddhāntam* will be given in the form of aphorisms. The *Brahma Sūthram* is such a book for our *Vēdāntā sampradhāyā*. The very first *Sūthra* of that book speaks of the subject matter of the book as '*Brahma Jijnāsa*'. '*Jijnāsa*' means the 'eagerness to know'. '*Brahma Jijnāsa*' mentioned here means 'the enquiry done with the keen desire to know the Brahman'. That which has been given as the subject of the book is the object of the religionists for whom that book is the authority. What I wanted to say is that in the *Sūthra* which is the authority for our Vēdhic religion our goal has been given as knowing the Brahman. Knowing the Brahman is to experience it. Therefore the goal of our religion is *Brahma Sākhāthkāram*. It is only to reach us to that goal that the first *Sūthra* of that book says that it is going to enquire into Brahman and tell us all about it. The point to be noted is that the subject

speaks about Brahma *sākshāthkāram* instead of release from *samsārā*, that is *mōksha*. Instead of saying only the negative aspect that the bad *samsārā* goes as denoted by '*mōksha Jijnāsa*' it says the good aspect by '*Brahma Jijnāsa*'.

Although the basic *Sūthra* of the *Vedhānthā* religion is like this the reason why only *mōksha* is being widely spoken of is : I have said something about this earlier. Another thing that occurs to me is that even in olden times when the ideas of *Vedānthā* took shape, later *Buddhisim*, *Pāthanjalām* (that is *Yōga Sāsthram*) *Nyāyam* (Tharkam) etc appeared and their ideas also took shape. In human society there will always be different ideas. Thus even in our own religion which is called *Vaidhikam*, in the *Vēdhā* itself there are certain views different from it in certain areas. In later days, these differences were highlighted and new religions took birth. In all these, except in *atheism* which does not believe in anything, all religions have as their central idea the release from the bondage of *samsārā*. We can say that all religions which are different from pure *Vedānthā* talk of only release from *samsārā*. But if it is asked whether all these religions talk of the state of supreme bliss (*Sathchithānandam*) attained by Brahma *sākshāthkāram* the answer is 'no'. *Buddhism* talks of *Nirvāṇā* in which the end is *śunīyam*. *Nyāya* and *Vaisēsikā* talk of 'Apavargam' (emancipation) from sorrow. They say that it is the state in which sorrow is destroyed and not of the state of bliss. When the bondage of *samsārā* goes sorrow is remedied. Since it is not said to be attaining bliss there is room for thinking that it is the state of being a 'jadam' without knowing any sorrow. Even in *Kaivalyam* which is the goal of '*Sāṅkyam*' the release from the play of *prakruthi* (*māyā*) is mentioned but the positive blissful state is not mentioned. Even in *Pāthanjala Yōgam*, when mentioning the goal in the very first *Sūthrā* there is no positive statement about Brahma *Sākshāthkāram* but it talks negatively of controlling the run of *chiththam*.

The seed for all these religions has been there from ancient times. That is why our *Vedhānthā* religion has also talked of the release from the bondage of *samsāra* as the goal of 'mōksham' which is common for all religions. This appears to be one of the reasons.

When that *mōksham* is attained by following the path of *Vedānthā* it will automatically be Brahma *Sākshāthkāram* only. In Brahma *Sākshāthkāram* one does not come to know or experience something new called Brahman nor does he achieve any new state of bliss - state of *Sachithānandam*. *Jīvā* is always Brahman, he is *Sachithānandam*. But *māyā* had kept him in bondage in a manner that he was not aware of his real state. When the *Sāadhanā* has been completed that bondage gets cut off; he gets release from *māyā*; that is, he attains *mōksham*. At once he knows his true form to be Brahman. All *Sāadhanā* is only for the *māyā* to go, to get release from *māyā* and not to create the *Sachithānanda* Brahman nor to attain it nor to do anything connected with it. It cannot be created, cannot be destroyed. It is there all the time. There is no room for 'attaining' what is already in one's hands.

Looking at it from this angle since the result of *Sāadhanā* is a release which breaks the bondage of *māyā* treating the goal of *Sāadhanā* as *mōksham* is justified.

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MUMUKSHU : AS DEFINED BY ĀCHĀRYĀ

Getting released from *māyā* and focussing the mind only on attaining the state of Brahman and being engaged only in that is 'Mumukshutha'.

Ahankārādhi dhēhānthān bandhān anjāna kalpithān
Swasswarupā (a) vabhōdhēna mōkthumichchā mumukshuthā

This is the definition given by *Āchāryā* in *Vivēka Chūdāmaṇi* (*Ślokā* 27). Here *Āchāryā* has spoken of both the *māyā* from which one has to get release and the awareness and experience of one's true form (*Swarūpa sākshātkāram*).

Anjñāna (nescience) is itself *māyā*. It is because of *māyā* that the ego of 'I' as different from *Paramāthmā* is caused. This ego is the starting point of all misunderstanding. Starting from the ego which is in a subtle form as thoughts it gets into every physical body and ends there. The final act of *māyā* (nescience) is to make one feel that the body is 'I'. From the very subtle ego to the physical body nescience induces bondages and keeps the *jīvā* tied down to them. This is what *Āchāryā* has said in '*Ahankārādhi dhēhānthān bandhān anjñāna kalpithān*'. The desire to get freed from this bondage - *mōkthum ichcha* - is called 'mumukshutha'. This is the negative definition of *mōksham*. *Āchāryā* has incorporated in the middle of the *ślokā* in a positive way what the final stage is by the words '*Swasswarūpa (a) vabhōdhēna*'. *Swa - Swarūpa* - *avabhōdha* - *avabhōdham* is to get awakened'; to get awakened from the darkness of *anjñāna* to *jñāna*. *Jñānam* about what? It is about '*Swa Swarūpam*' - that is about *āthmā* which is the real nature. Instead of saying 'about *āthmā*' it would be more appropriate to say awakening to his becoming *āthmā* itself - what is called 'Awareness'. If *māyā* is *anjñāna*, *Brahmam* is *jñānam*.

Getting released from bondage is not the final goal in itself. Our *Āchāryā* will not call as mumukshu one who considers release itself as an end in itself in the thought 'this bondage is suffering. Therefore let it go. After that we can be like a stone without any feeling of suffering'. Unlike Pathanjali who has said that it is enough to arrest the oscillations of the chiththa, *Āchāryā* will not leave it at that. Is not *Brahma Jijnāsa* the subject or object of his basic *Sūthram*? Therefore he would call only the thirst for release from the bondage of ignorance for attaining *Brahma*

sākshāthkāram as 'mumukshutha' and the one who has such a thirst as mumukshu. It is clear from this *ślōkā* that 'Swasswarūpa (a)vabhōdhēna' means 'due to the awakening of *āthma jnāna*'. He says that by such awakening one should have the strong desire to get released from the bondage of *anjnāna*. When it is said like this, first it is *sākshāthkāram* (avabhōdham mentioned here) and then and because of that the release from bondage. But this should not be understood to mean that that *sākshāthkāram* which is positive leads to *mōksha* which is negative. Any one who knows the goal of Vēdhic religion and has studied *Āchāryā's* works and knows his mind will not understand it like that.

Between the release from bondage (bandha *mōksham*) and *sākshāthkāram* there is nothing lkike one being the first and the other being the second. Both occur simultaneously. We strike a match stick in a dark room. Light comes and darkness goes. Does darkness go a little after light has appeared? Do not both occur simultaneously? But one thing must be noted. It is not that darkness goes and light comes just at that time. It is only when light appears darkness goes at the same time.

This is where the greatness of Vēdanthic religion lies. It has as its central idea the discovery of the effulgence of the Self (*āthma jyōthi*) and starting from *nithyānithya vasthu vivēkam* it moves up. Unlike Buddha who talked of destruction of sorrow, Pathanjali who talked of arresting the chiththam, the rishis of Upanishads, the author of *Brahma Sūthra* and *Āchāryā* have all talked about *Brahma Sākshāthkāram*. They have talked of going in the quest of Sathyam - that is, to go in search of what is Truth and find it out. Whether *samsāram* is good or bad, happy or sorrowful, let it be. But if it is continuously operating without a break like a flood this can happen only on the support of something which is stable and permanent. As far as we, the perishable *jīvās* are concerned also, there should be something which is imperishable and which gives

life, intelligence and energy to us. Our great men of yore were those who set out with enthusiasm and courage in the search to find out what it is and with the faith that they could find it. Their search for truth was for the sake of truth. They were not those who thought 'there is sorrow; the jīvās are suffering;' and therefore set out crying to find release from this whatever may be the state after gaining such release. They were those who had set out to find the 'āthma jyōthis' which is the truth and which is being hidden by māyā. They made others also follow suit.

I referred to those who did not set out crying. It was Buddha who set out crying. But his followers when praising him say 'he went in search of 'bōdha' that is positive jnāna, then he attained jnāna under the bōdhi tree. That is how he got the name Buddha'. They also mention a ślōkā which they say was recited by Buddha before he sat under the tree. The ślōkā is such that we too praise it - saying that there can be no better example of 'mumukshuthah'.

Ihāsanē kashyathu mē śarīram

Thvagasthi māmsani layam prayānthu

Aprāpya bōdham bahukalpa dhurlabham

*Naivāsanāth kāyamidham chalishyathi **

(*This is a ślōkā which appears in 'Lalitha Visthara' which is the story of Buddha)

'Let this body become like dried ginger. Let the skin, bone and flesh perish. Without attaining bōdham - even if it means that it can be attained only after several kalpas - this body will not move from here.' He said this with great conviction. However that may be, our Upanishad rishis with great courage and leaving everything set out to know the truth.

One who keeps doing Sāadhanā with finding the truth as the only goal will find the 'sathya jyōthi' and from that he will infer that the darkness of māyā has gone. If you see how the jnānis have

described their experience they say that they were doing 'āthma vichāram' with concentration and they suddenly saw the effulgence of the āthmā. They would not have said that something like the bondage of māyā disappeared and then they had āthma sākshāthkāram; The only goal of a true adhvaitha Sādhaka is 'āthma sākshāthkāram'. It is for that alone he keeps meditating on the Mahā Vākya at the conclusion of his Sādhānā and actually experiences the non-difference between Jīvā - Brahman which the Mahā Vākya proclaims. By the experience which materializes it is understood that the bondage is gone. That is why Āchāryā has talked of release from bondage (bandha mōksham) being after sākshāthkāram : Swasswarūpa bōdhēna mōksham. That is all.

I have said 'avabōdham' is 'waking up'. Does sleep run away on its own and does the waking state appear then? We just wake up. We then understand that sleep is gone. The bondage going away is also like this.

We can interpret it in another way. Swasswarūpa avabhōdhāya: a mumukshu desires to have the release from bondage only for the 'āthma jnānam' to awaken. When he goes above that state and attains siddhi, Swasswarūpa avabhōdhēna - he realizes that by the arising of jnāna 'bandha mōksham' has materialized.

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THE LOWER LEVEL, MIDDLE LEVEL MUMUKSHU

I have said that having intense desire for mōksham is 'mumukshuthvam' (although the word 'mōksha' is used in accordance with the general view, it should be understood as 'sākshāthkāram'. I am using the word 'mōksham' both according to the general view and what Āchāryā says following the same view). But Āchāryā who is compassionate approves even those

who do not have such intense desire as lower level (*mandha*) and middle level (*madhyama*) *mumukshus* and in the next *ślōkā* he gives words of encouragement to them also. Being at lower level is *mandha*; at the middle level it is *madhyama* and at the top it is *uththama*. In *Upāsanā* it is usual to classify the aspirants (*Sādhakas*) as '*mandhādhikāri*', '*madhyamādhikāri*', and '*uththamādhikāri*'.

In *Adhvaitha Sāadhanā* it is only if the top level is reached *mumukshutha* will become deep. In other words it is the *uththamādhikāri* who will discard the desire for all else and have a one pointed desire for *mōksham* only. But out of compassion, *Āchāryā* has provided space in this too for the *mandha* and *madhyama* '*ādhikāris*'. Does not even the one who is at the bottom level start *Sāadhanā* only with the desire for *mōksham*? *Āchāryā* has thought that he too has *mumukshutha* in the *mandha* state. He will do more *Sāadhanā* and after gaining maturity he will understand better than when he was at the beginning that life is *māyā* and will start thinking more about *mōksham*. This is *madhyama* state. But even now *chiththam* will not be steady but will be oscillating. Although *mumukshutha* which was momentary in the beginning will now remain somewhat steady, it will not take root and *māyā* will take hold. Due to this the *madhyama* *mumukshu* may lose faith thinking 'Oh for me! How can there be *mōksham*!'. If he feels like this it is not necessary to speak of the one in *mandha* state. It is for encouraging them also and making them continue the *Sāadhanā*, *Āchāryā* with compassion says :

*Mandha madhyama Rūpāpi vairāgyēṇa samādhinā
Prasādhēna gurōh sēyam pravrudhdhā sūyathē phalam*

'Dear child! Do not worry. If there is *guru prasādam* anything will be possible. But you too practice *vairāgya* to make yourself deserving of it, practice *samādhī* *shadgam*. If you do like this, even if your *mumukshutha* is *mandha* or *madhyama* by *guru*'s

grace it will grow and yield fruit', he says. Of the three namely, mandham, madhyama and uththamam, *Āchāryā* has referred to uththama as 'pravrudhham' - meaning what has developed well. He says that instead of wailing that he cannot do it, if he makes efforts to the extent he can, together with the grace of the guru, even mandha and madhyama will become uththamam.

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GURU'S PRASAD

Guru's prasad is needed not only for 'mumukshutha'; in the process of *Sādhana* everything from A to Z can become full only by guru's *prasād*. By the guru showing compassion for the *śishyā* who makes efforts with a pure heart and by showering his grace he must succeed in each step and move on to the higher step.

Then, in the third stage of *Sādhana*, surrender to the guru and guru's grace are very important. If upto this stage one has committed mistake in regard to affairs of the indriyas etc it is not big *dhōsham*. But at the stage in which he has to take to *sanyāsa āśramam* and receive the *manthrā Upadēsam* of *Mahā Vākya* - and even after that - if the mind goes the wrong way even a little, it will be great *dhōsham* and great sin. If at such a stage one believes he can set himself right, that will not be possible. Self confidence is of course necessary. But if it is attempted to protect oneself with that only it will not be sufficient. For him to progress on the path of *Sādhana* without incurring any sin and keep to the track like the wheels of the train, in addition to his own strength and even more than that, the power of grace is very necessary. That is why here guru prasad has been specially mentioned. Since *sanyāsam* and *Mahā Vākya* have been received when mumukshuthvam became strong, Guru prasad is being mentioned here as a reminder for all that has to happen henceforth.

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ĀCHĀRYĀ AND ANCIENT TEXTS ON MUMUKSHU

Āchāryā who has spoken about *mumukshuthā* in several places has particularly mentioned in *Vivēka Chūdāmāṇī* when elaborating on *Manōmaya Kōsam* - when he goes on talking about each *kōsam* starting from *Annāmaya Kōsam*.

We have seen that Āchāryā has spoken of *śraddhā*, *samādhānam* relating them to buddhi. When talking of *mumukshuthā* he has spoken by relating it to the mind. From this it should not be understood that *mumukshuthā* must take shape in the mind only. He shows that only if one is very particular about rejecting the mind he can become a proper mumukshu and proceed on the right path. Upto a stage whatever occurs in the mind has to be sifted between good and bad, the bad rejected and the good taken. Later when ripeness is attained for the development of intense *mumukshuthā* whose only aim is *mōksham* there should be the following determination : 'what is good also originates in the mind and is experienced by the mind. *Ātmā* cannot be attained by the mind; it can be attained only after the mind is destroyed. Therefore several things which are good and the mind which is their support should be rejected and we have to go in search of the only one *ātmā*'. That is why when talking of the *manōmaya kōsam* he gives the warning, advice etc meant for the mumukshu.

The mumukshu, as the first task, (he says 'agrē' meaning 'at first' as the first task) strengthens *vivēka* and *vairāgya*. Prefacing with the observation that only if these two are excessive, purity of mind can be achieved he goes on to say 'Mind is a big tiger - *mahā vyāgram*'. It is roaming about in the forest of the objects of enjoyment. Mumukshu who is a *sādhū* should not go anywhere near it.' If mind is a tiger it means that it has to be rejected. But he says 'you be away from it'. It means that even good things should not be thought of and done with the mind. For this *vivēka* and *vairāgyam* and the purity resulting from them are necessary.

Āchāryā says 'it is the mind which generates all the things for one who indulges in enjoying the sense objects. (V.C. 177)

It is the mind which is the cause for one remaining continuously involved in *karmās* and experiencing their fruits. Putting it briefly a *vidhyā* (that is *anjnāna* which is the opposite of *jñāna*) itself is mind only. The great ones who have understood the philosophical truths say so :

Athah prāhur manō(a)vidhyām pandithās thathva dharsinah
(V.C. 180)

Therefore it is the mind which is to be rejected. As a preliminary to that a mumukshu should purify it and make it light. What has been made impure by dirty thoughts and has become hardened should be made light by cleansing it. Then *Mukthi* will become as easy of access as a fruit on one's hand.

While concluding *Vivēka Chūdāmaṇi* Āchāryā says effectively that all the *Upadēśams* contained in it are for the mumukshu only. What is clear from this is that mumukshuthvam continues to be there till one becomes *mukthā*. In the system of *Sādhana* it is said that after this he should take *sanyāsam*, do *sravaṇam*, *mananam* and *nidhidhyāsanam*, experience *sākshāthkāram* and become a *mukthā*. Although *sravaṇa*, *manana* etc are mentioned after this, even then the thirst for attaining *mōksha* should continue to be there. From the characteristics of a mumukshu, described by Āchāryā at the end of the book it is seen that he refers even to the one who has peaked in *nidhidhyāsanam* and is quite close to *sākshāthkāram* as mumukshu. This is what he says :

Hithamimamupadēśamadhriyanthām
Vihitha nirastha samastha chiththa dhōshāh
Bhavasukha vimukāh praśānta chiththāh
Śruthirasikā yathayō mumukshavō yē (V.C. 578)

In the first leg of the *ślōkā* he says that those keeping whom in view he wrote *Vivēka Chūdāmāni* should appreciate it; Hitham, imam, *Upadēsam*, *adhriyanthām*. In the next three legs he gives their characteristics : Vihitha, nirastha, samastha, chiththa dhōshah' means 'those who have cured the chiththa of all impurities in accordance with the methods prescribed by *sāsthrās*'. 'Bhavasukha *vimukāh*' : The direct meaning is 'those who have turned their faces away from the pleasures of *samsāra*'; that is those who have discarded the sensual enjoyments with disgust.

'*Praśānta chiththāh*' - those who are of serene minds.

Śruthirasika - those who take delight in *sruthi*.

Yathaya - Yathi, that is *sanyāsis*; and finally

Mumukshuvah - mumukshus

The word 'Yē' coming at the end means 'those'. So the meaning of the *ślōkā* is 'those who have cured the chiththa of impurities, those who are averse to worldly pleasures, those of serene minds, those who take delight in *Vēdhās*; who are *sanyāsis* and mumukshus - may they appreciate this salutary teaching'.

I wanted to say that the characteristics of a mumukshu given here by *Āchāryā* show that he is one who has taken *sanyāsam* and has progressed to the top of *Sāadhanā*. It is seen that till the moment one has become *Jīvanmukthā* after experiencing Brahman (*Brahmānubhavam*) in *samādhi* he is a mumukshu.

Āchāryā has provided the setting of a story to the *Vivēka Chūdāmāni Upadēsam*. A *sisyā* goes to a great person and asked him. 'Kō nāma bandhah? Kathamēsha āgathah? Katham prathishtā (a)sya? Katham vimōkshah? 'What is the bondge of *samsārā*? How did it come about? How did it become permanent? How to get release from that?' It is in the form of that guru's reply that *Āchāryā* has given the *Upadēsam* through *Vivēka Chūdāmāni*.

Since that *śiṣhyā* received the *Upadēśam* with real *mumukshuthā* and *dēvōtion* to the guru, even at the end of the *Upadēśam* he got *jñāna*, experience, the height of all namely the Brahma *Jñāna* and Brahma *Sākshāthkāram*, got released from the bondage about which he asked in the beginning - *Nirmuktha bandhah*, says the *ślōkā* - prostrated to the guru and left. Guru although he had no desire to go anywhere, left for purifying the world. Thus *Āchāryā* completes the setting. Then *Āchāryā* says in his own words : 'Thus by way of a dialogue between a guru and a *śiṣhyā* the nature of the *āthman* has been ascertained for the easy comprehension of seekers after liberation'. It is after that the *ślōkā* describing the *mumukshus* occurs.

Since *Āchāryā* has approved of *mandha*, *madhyama* and *uththama* types of *mumukshu*, from those like us who have a slight desire for *mōksha* and upto those who have become real *sanyāsīs* all are included in *mumukshus*. It is with a noble heart he has given this title of *mumukshu* to all people. But even when so doing he has taken care of the need to raise the *mandha* and *madhyama* *mumukshus* to the level of *uththama* and has shown them the way for it, as discussed earlier.

Since an aspirant must have the strength of intense *mumukshuthā* and the strength of guru's grace for him to realize the *āthmā*, it has been said in the Upanishad '*Āthmā* cannot be attained by a weak person'.

Guru's grace actually means *Īśwarā's* grace. The *śiṣhyā* should never forget that it is *Īśwarā* who comes as guru. Particularly for one who is an aspirant in *Adhvaitham* since he goes to '*Nirguṇa jñāna*' without worship of *Īśwarā* in *Saguṇa* form it is very necessary that he has to ensure that guru and guru *prasādam* take root in him in the place of the grace of *Īśwarā*. I shall deal with this later.

In the Upanishad in which it is said that a weak person cannot realize the *āthman*, in the earlier *manthrās* the characteristics of a mumukshu have been mentioned. There it is said that the *āthmā* shows its effulgence only to those who without any other desire courageously select only the *āthman*.

What is said here namely 'selecting only the *āthman*' is the positive form of *mumukshuthā*. Quite opposite to getting released out of disgust for *samsārā* he is choosing voluntarily and with love. Here one discards all things other than *āthmā* and selects the *āthmā*. The Upanishad talks positively of the goal and the keen desire to achieve it.

Āchāryā also has spoken of the same positive form of mumukshutha; *Āthmēchahā vyavasīyathām* (*Sōpāna Panchakam - Ślōkā* 1). It means that the desire for *āthma sākshāthkāram* must be made very firm. In *Sōpāna Panchakam* in which he starts from *karmā* - bhakthi and goes step by step upto *sākshāthkāram*, in the step before renouncing home and becoming a *sanyāsi* whose *mumukshuthā* is to be spoken about, instead of talking of what is to be discarded and saying 'have desire for *mōksham*' he talks of 'what is to be had' namely love for the *āthmā*.

In many places in the Upanishad, instead of talking of what is to be given up, going in search of what is to be got has been spoken of. Appar *Swāmigaḷ* has said 'I have searched within me and found'. 'Six persons who are having Brahman only for their goal, who were 'Brahma Nishtar' (those who have attachment only for matters connected with Brahman - here nishtai is not remaining in the experience of *samādhi*; since those who have a keen desire to have that experience are spoken of nishtai must be understood as dedication) who were 'Brahma *anvēśhamānar*' (those engaged in the enquiry of Brahman) went to an *āchāryā* who was a Maharishi' - thus begins the *Praśnōpanishad*. Here it positively describes the six as mumukshus. Just as the mumukshus who are engaged in the

search of *Paramāthmā* are described here as 'Anvēshamāñār' in *Chāndōgyam* that *Paramāthmā* has been referred to as 'Anvēshtavyan' (one who has to be searched for and found out).

What *Katōpanishad* says about *Nachikēthas* looks like showing to the world the ideal *mumukshu*. That youngster's only desire, only aim, was to know the truth about the *āthman*. Under some circumstances his father told him in anger 'I have given you to Yama'. Immediately the boy obeyed the words of the father and went to Yamapuri. After death it is Yama who takes the life. Therefore *Nachikēthas* firmly believed that Yama must be knowing the '*āthma thathvam*' which is the real state of the life. He decided that he must have *Upadēsam* of the same from Yama. If that boy went to Yamapuri - in the very thought of which everyone trembles - considering it as the gurukulam the reason is the real *mumukshuthā* which he had. When he went there Yama was not in his abode. He came three days later. During the three days that *Nachikēthas* remained there he did not accept any of the hospitality extended to him by the people in *Yamā's* abode and he observed *upavāsam*. In his thirst for the goal he thought 'I will not take food till I receive the *Upadēsam* I want.'

Then Yama - who makes the world tremble - came to the boy with the fear 'a *brahmachāri* boy has remained without food in our place for three days with fire-like thirst. I am afraid it may burn me'. He trembled before that young boy and gave him three boons, one for each day that he had remained there without food.

The third and important boon that *Nachikēthas* asked for was *Upadēsam* of '*āthma thathvam*' (the truth about *āthmā*).

Before giving that supreme *Upadēsam*, in order to make himself sure about the intensity of the boy's *mumukshuthā* - or Yama must have been sure of it but wanted to show to the world how an ideal *mumukshu* should be - he put him to a test.

He told the boy '*āthma thathva* is such a thing that will confuse even the *Dēvās*. Therefore you ask some other boon'.

Nachikēthas remained adamant and said 'From the very fact you say like this the eagerness to know that truth has become greater. Therefore no other boon will equal what I asked for. You must give me *Upadēsam* of that only. There is no one other than you who can tell me clearly'.

'I will give you elephants, horses, gold, land, sons, grandsons, longevity as long as you desire - I will give you all these. Whatever else you desire I will bless you with that too. I will give you all my paraphernalia which the humans can never get. But do not press for your boon' said Yama. He put a gold garland around his neck.

Nachikēthas did not become weary. He told Yama firmly 'Whatever you give will return to you one day or the other. I want only that which is permanent. This *Nachikēthas* will not ask for anything else'. Yama became immensely pleased and told him 'Dear child! You have discarded all the desire as trash. You have fixed your mind on *vidhyā* (*jinānam*) only. In future may I get one who will ask me like you have asked. (This means it is impossible to get one like *Nachikēthas*). You are really valiant. The door to *Brahma lokam* has been opened for you.' (*Brahma lokam* here does not mean the world of the four-faced - Chathurmuka *Brahma*. What he says is that the way for knowing the truth that is *Brahman* has been opened for him). After praising him like this he gives him the *Upadēsam*.

At the end of the Upanishad, *Nachikēthas* who came as a *mumukshu* and became the *mukthā* is mentioned. It is also said that anyone who has known the 'thathva' like *Nachikēthas* will become a *mukthā*. 'Like *Nachikēthas*' means 'with intense *mumukshuthā*'.

Chathushtayam, the four part system of *Sādhānā*, concludes with *mumukshuthvam*.

* * *

FOUR KINDS OF SPIRITUAL ARMY

In olden times the army consisted of four divisions - Chariots, elephants, horses and the soldiers. Since it consisted of four wings it was called 'chathuranga sēnā'. The system of *Sāadhanā* to fight against the evil forces in order to acquire the spiritual empire (*āthma sāmrajyam*) is like the army which consisted of the four wings. Mumukshuthvam is the last in that.

Since mumukshuthvam has been prescribed for practice, it means that the desire for *moksha* which was just ordinary in the beginning and which gradually gained strength has to be made intense at this stage with the full involvement of buddhi and mind. During *Sāadhanā* now and then there will be slip, causing disbelief about one being able to get release from bondage and have *sākshāthkāram*. But no room should be given for such a mentality. Not only that, it must be practiced with the conviction, 'we can get release; we can know the truth. If we do it with tenacity and with thirst for it will it fail to become ours? Will not guru's *prasādam* take care of our ups and downs and make them all right? Therefore we will struggle with the desire for release and truth'. *Mumukshuthā* should be practiced with the faith that guru's *prasād* will not let us fail.

With this we come to the end of *Sāadhanā Chathushtayam*. But this is also the second stage only. There is the stage beyond this.

* * *

BEFORE THE THREE PARTS OF THE THIRD STAGE

After practicing *Sāadhanā Chathushtayam* well, taking *sanyāsam* and the *Upadēsam* of *Mahā Vākya* from a guru, learning *Brahma Vidhyā*, *sāsthrās-sampradhāyās* and practical experiences of which the guru gives *Upadēsam*, assimilating them, one should be in *dhyāna* for the entire thing to become actual

experience. If one continues to mediate on it *Brahmānubhavam* will materialize. What I have said now is given in the order - *śravaṇam*, *mananam* and *nidhidhyāsanam*. But before going into the stage I should, following the *Āchāryā*, deal with the place of bhakthi in *jñāna mārga*.

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BHAKTHI : ITS PLACE IN JNĀNA MĀRGA

*Mōksha kāraṇa sāmagra yām bhakthirēva garīyasi
Swasrūpānusandhānam bhakthirithyabhidhiyathe*

(V.C. 31)

Mumukshu is one who desires *mōksham*. There are several means and aids to attain it. *Śravaṇa-manana-nidhidhyāsana* are such. The parts of *Sādhāna Chathushtayam* about which we have seen till now are also means for *mōksham*. They are called '*sāmagri*'. All things which are used in making a thing are together called '*samagri*'. It is used in the sense of they being implements. Hence in '*Mōksha kāraṇa sāmagra yām*' should be understood as 'of the implements which are the cause for attaining *mōksham*'. '*Gariyasi*' means 'that which is weighty'. In Ashta Siddhis one by which the person becomes heavy like a stone is called '*garima*'. When something is said to be 'weighty' it means it is important, *sreshta*. That is the sense in which we say that someone is a '*Ganavān*'. If we see what he says is the best of the means for *mōksham* he says 'bhakthi'.

In the order which *Āchāryā* himself has designed it is generally thought to be '*Sādhana Chathushtayam*', then *śravaṇam*, *mananam* and *nidhidhyāsanam*; although it is generally thought that with that it is the end of that path *Āchāryā* brings here bhakthi and says that it is the important means.

Āchāryā has prescribed two paths - bhakthi and *jñāna*. But as Adhvaitha *āchāryā* he gives *Upadēsam* of *jñāna mārgā* only in

Viveka Chūdāmaṇī and has given the scheme of *Sādhana*. Even so, he has given so much importance to bhakthi. He says that bhakthi is the important means for *mōksham*. It is not as if there is no room for bhakthi in what is well-known to the world as his *jñāna mārḡā*. But its place is in the very beginning, at the bottom level, that is even before commencing *Sādhana Chathushtayam*. The qualification for taking to *jñāna mārḡā* is pure 'chiththam' which can remain in a state of concentration. He has prescribed '*nishkāmya karmā*' for cleansing the chiththam and the way of worship through bhakthi for gaining concentration. That is, in Adhvaitha *Sādhana*, bhakthi is considered a '*Bhahiranga Sādhanam*'.

In *Sādhana* there are two types, namely 'antharanga and bhahiranga'. Antharanga is what helps directly in attaining the goal. The learned call it 'internal'. Bhahirangam is indirect and 'external'. If there is a dinner the direct cause for it are the one who hosts it and the occasion for hosting it. These are antharangam. But all other things like the materials used, those who supplied them etc are also causes. Most of them are in the list of indirect causes.

Jñāna has been prescribed as the '*antharanga Sādhana*' for *mōksham*. *Śravaṇam*, *mananam* and *nidhidhyāsanam* are antharanga causes for attaining *jñāna* and also *Sādhana Chathushtayam* though not to that extent. Beyond all these are *karmā* and bhakthi which are '*bhahiranga Sādhanām*'. It is well known that this is how it has been kept in Adhvaitha *sampradhāyam*.

When that is so, *Achāryā* who is Adhvaitha *Pratishtāpanāchāryā* has brought in bhakthi which is '*bhahiranga Sādhanam*' as one of the '*sāmagris*' and also calls it '*garīyasi*' and has given the status of 'antharangam'. How is this? To know this we have to understand what bhakthi is.

* * *

WHAT IS BHAKTHI?

The popular and general view about bhakthi is that it is to show love to *Paramāthmā* treating him as a *Dēvathā Mūrthi* through a *Saguṇa* form. Because it is not possible to do bhakthi merely through the mind we are having *pūjā*, worship at temple, reciting of *sthōthrās* etc. All that is all right. But when we consider bhakthi at the 'higher grade' level instead of thinking that bhakthi can be practiced only to a *Mūrthi* with a form one should practice to show love to *Paramāthmā* even when He is without form and succeed in it. When there is a *Mūrthi* with a form - eyes, nose, four hands, eight hands etc the decorations with fine cloth and jewels etc and since the glories and compassion of the *Mūrthis* are described by *Purāṇās* and *sāsthrās* it is possible to show love to that *Mūrthi*. Such love is bhakthi. Of the different types of love the highest form shown to *Īswarā* is bhakthi. It is easy to show bhakthi to a *Saguṇamūrthi* with form which pleases the eyes and qualities which please the mind. One may think how it will be possible to show love to *Paramāthmā* without a form and who is *Nirguṇa*.

This may be impossible in our state. We may therefore continue with '*Mūrthi pūjā*', pilgrimages etc. But aspirants who are refined can show love to that which is without form or quality. But first let us see what is 'love'.

* * *

WHAT IS LOVE?

It is only one *Paramāthmā* which is as several lives. When there are several, *māyā* enacts a drama by which each is made to look different from the other. There is a force created by *Paramāthmā* which can unite different things and that force is love. The general tendency is for people to gain something from others. As opposed to this, giving ourselves to someone else and finding fulfillment in that is love. This is the difference between desire and love. If we have desire for a thing we seek pleasure from it. But

when we show love to something we give it happiness. Desire is taking and love is giving. We will have happiness from another if we get something from him - out of good looks, good qualities, wealth etc. The attachment we develop to it only for the sake of these is desire. We mistake it for love.

Love is generated when *anthahkaraṇam* is at the highest state. At that time the mind and buddhi will be drawn into *anthahkaraṇam* and *anthahkaraṇam* will change its place into the heart and work from there. Since *Ambāl* is of the form of love, She has so blessed that even those beings which are cruel in creation itself will occasionally have the feeling of love. But for those who have refined mind and buddhi due to *Sāḍhanā*, there is always love. At that time the heart will become the permanent seat of the *anthahkaraṇa*.

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ANTHAHKARAṆAM (INNER SENSE ORGANS) AND THE HEART

It is 'antha' karaṇam. But it directs itself not to the internal but to the external. Because it is not seen like the hands, legs, eyes etc and is inside it is called 'anthahkaraṇam'. It dwells on the enjoyments of the world of duality. It will be so for all *jīvās*. It will get hardened by the impurity of experiences and be like a copper or brass vessel covered by verdigris.

Coming to 'hrudhayam' it is not what all of us understand to be in the left side of the chest. It is the place of the *āthmā*. *

(* Sri Ramaṇa Maharishi used to say that in the right side of a person is the heart as the place of *āthmā*)

It is true that *āthmā* has no particular place but permeates all over. But by the grace of *Īswarā* when one wants to turn the chiththam (anthahkaraṇam) which is always after duality towards adhvaitham and mediate on the *āthmā* he needs to have a grip on

something. But to have that how will it be all right if a form or quality is adduced to the *āthmā* in a way that is wholly *Sagunā* or duality? How then to provide the grip? If it is said that it is spread all over and transcends space, it cannot be imagined. That is why a particular point inside the body is kept as the place of 'hrudhayam' and *āthmā* can be imagined to be there. Who has kept it? It is *Parāsakthi*. She who is the creator of all the *māyā* of duality bestows Her grace on someone to take him to Adhvaitham. She has kept that point as the place of *āthmā* where the *anthahkaraṇa* will remain collected. It is the place where the *anthahkaraṇa* which gives the individuality to each life and the breath which gives life to the body come together and subside in one root. When they subside like that it is at that place '*āthmanubhūthi*' (experience of the Self) begins surfacing.

It is a point, a minute dot which is a hole. It is said to be like the sharp tip of a particular variety of paddy (*nīvāra sūkavath*). In the heart which is like the inverted lotus bud there is a subtle hole; from that the fire which is the life force spreads all over the body; at the center of the fire there is the atom-like effulgence - the '*prāṇa agni*' which is like a streak of lightning - the place where it ends as '*nīvāra sūkavath*' is the place of *āthmā*. *

(* *Nārāyaṇa sūktham* 1, 2)

When it is said there is the '*āthma sthānam*' as a point-like hole inside the hrudhayam it means that the hrudhayam surrounds it. That is also a small place. There are two words used in the Upanishad. Dhaharam, Dhahram. Both mean 'small'. Later, Dhaharam became 'Dhahram'. In the Upanishad the hrudhayam and the *āthma sthānam* inside it is described as 'Dhaharam' which is within 'Dhaharam' and 'Dhahram' within 'Dhahram'. The sathyam (Brahmam) which permeates the entire space is inside what is so small.

When the entire world is considered as '*Virāt Puruṣa*' Chidambaram is the hrudhayam of the *Virāt Puruṣa*. Chith Sabhai

in Chidambaram is that point in the hrudhayam. It is of the form of a hole. *Ākāśam* is in that. It is a secret. Of the *kshēthrās* for five elements (*Panchabūtha kshēthrās*) Chidambaram is '*Ākāśa Kshēthram*'. Chith Sabhai is also called 'Dhabra Sabai', the exact Tamil equivalent of which is 'Chitrambalam' (Small Ambalam). It is not correct to think that it is Chitrambalam which has become Chidambaram. Chidambaram is 'Chith - Ambaram' - that is *Jnāna ākāśa*. Ambaram in Sanskrit means '*ākāśa*' and not a *sabhā*.

If that concerns the *Virāt Purushā*, in the hrudhayam of each of us there is a small *ākāśa*, a hole of the size of a point. I said that the principle of life (*jīva bhāvam*) goes inside it, keeps declining and finally subsides. This happens when *jīvā* becomes *Sivan*. This is beautifully described as 'involution'. This is the activity of something which has expanded and shown itself out, again closed up and subsided inside. It is inside this hrudhayam that the ego 'I am an individual jiva' is born out of the evolution of the *Paramāthmā* as *jīvā* with body, indriyas, *anthahkaraṇa* etc. *Ahankāram* is the thought 'I am individual who is different from Brahman'. That is the starting point of *Siva* evolving as jiva.

Evolution is called the process of creation (*śrushti krama*) and involution is called 'the process of annihilation (*laya kramam*)'. *Layam* is called '*Samhāram*' - annihilation - destruction. I used the more polished word 'laya' so that you may not be afraid of *Samhāram*. Actually *Samhāram* does not have the meaning which will create fear. 'Hara' means 'taking' something - like snatching. Sam - haram means *Paramāthmā* taking it fully into Himself.

The hrudhayam which is the place of *ahankārā* which detaches itself as an individual at the time of *śrushti* also becomes the place where the *anthahkaraṇam* comes together at the time of *Samhāram*. (when going to the *Paramāthmā* again, not as a temporary laya but uniting permanently). When it closes further

and remains at the sharp point at the center of the hrudhayam it is 'āthma spuraṇam'. The hrudhayam is the place where detaching from *Paramāthmā* as *jivāthmā* and again uniting with *Paramāthmā* takes place. It is like there being a door which is used both as entrance and exit.

I have said that of the four namely, chiththam, mind, buddhi and *ahankāram* which go to make the *anthahkaraṇam* the place of the mind is the neck and the place of *ahankāram* is the hrudhaya. The place of buddhi is the face. Chiththam is particularly mentioned as 'dhāraṇam' - memory. When it is as memory its place is the navel. But thought which is basic to the mind, buddhi and *ahankāram* is created by chiththam only. Therefore it is not necessary to give it a separate place. When the mind is confused between two things chiththam will be in the neck. But when it is decided to be one way or the other by the use of buddhi, chiththam will be in the face. When we establish ourselves as 'I' the *Jīva*, chiththa will also be in the hrudhayam which is the place of *ahankāram*.

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AHANKĀRAM AND LOVE

Since the wrong 'I' has to become the real 'I' it has to be turned away from the world of duality and has to be given the hold of something which will help in uniting with the Brahman. It is necessary to make the wrong 'I' that is *anthahkaraṇam* (*ahankāram*, mind and buddhi) go to the 'āthma sthānam' in the hrudhayam. If a person has become very fat and flabby how can he be let in through a small door? In the case of the person with a huge body we say that the door has to be demolished to let him in. But this door cannot be demolished. The person has to be made thin. How to make him thin?

This person (the 'I') has become fat by looking at all things in the mode of duality, taking from them many things and applying

them on himself. What has been applied like this has to be dissolved and then only by thinning the '*ahankāra anthahkaraṇam*' which is making him an individual in the dwaitha mode, he can enter through the hrudhayam and then the sharp point inside it and experience the true Self - the bliss of the state of Adhvaitham. The question is how to do it? It is only by practicing love.

It may be asked whether *anthahkaraṇam* has not been thinned by the practice of *vairāgyam*, *samam*, *dhamam* etc. But only the mind and buddhi were made thin by purifying them. But *ahankāram* is more subtle than these two. It is something which, without our knowing it, is taking revenge on us and burying us in the pit of duality. Therefore we ourselves may not know our haughtiness that 'we have achieved *vairāgyam*! *Sama*, *dhama* etc have borne fruit!' But the *ahankāra* inside will think that it has achieved this by itself and for itself and will be celebrating it as its own gain. That is, the 'individual I' which has to dissolve the gains it had through *Sāadhanā* in the *āthmā* and dissolve itself in it will be treating the gain as its own. Its receiving and getting fattened by this will continue. The feeling of 'individual I' which is the origin of all thoughts and feelings will not make itself lean so as to enter into the '*āthma sthānam*'. In other words ego surrender which is so essential for *sākshāthkāram* will not take place at all.

Love - the noble attitude of giving ourselves - is the way to make the highest achievement reach the *anthahkaraṇa*, the 'individual I' and make it lean. Fortunately since the *Sāadhanā* of *vivēka*, *vairāgya*, *sama*, *dhama* etc have already refined the *anthahkaraṇa* the aspirants (*Sādhakās*) have only to be careful and be determined so that it will be possible to generate the true love. It will be possible to entirely give away *ahankāram* - which is as individual - surrender the ego and show love.

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WHAT IS THE OBJECT OF THE LOVE OF A SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT? (ĀTHMA SĀDHAKĀ)

The love that gets generated has to be shown to something. Then it must have an object for this purpose. To what has one to give himself, dedicate himself? If it is asked whether he can give himself and show love to other people, to his place, his country, the world etc it should not be at this stage. If he does that there is the danger that he will establish relationship with them and get dragged into *māyā* again.

The story of 'Jata Bharatha' is sufficient to prove this. To dedicate oneself in service to others, the country and the world in the earlier stages is good. But that is part of *karma yōgam*. Now, when taking to *jnāna yōgam* in order to know that the world itself is *māyā* and to discard that world, talking of love to it and doing service to it is not compatible. When one achieves *sākshāthkāram* and becomes a *jnāni* it happens that due to *Īśwarā*'s prodding he will engage himself in service to the world. Did not *Āchāryā* himself do it? But that was after he had become '*māyā*-proof' so that *māyā* did not affect him. Moreover, the *jnāni* does not do anything by himself but acts merely as an instrument in carrying out *Īśwarā*'s *sankalpam*. Therefore one may show love before commencing *Adhvaitha Sāadhanā* or after attaining *siddhi* in it but not during the period of *Sāadhanā*. Because some who are part of tens of thousands of people do not show love to the world there is no great loss to the world. As a matter of fact the people of the world should think 'somehow we are entangled. A few people have set out in a rare manner to get release. Let us do whatever is needed to make their life's journey easy and do for them whatever is necessary'.

Therefore he is not to practice love to individuals or to the society. This does not mean he should be inimical to the society. It is neither love nor hatred. Since *ahimsa* is his chief goal - even

when he is entering into *sanyāsa āśramā* he has to take the vow 'no living being should have any fear of me' and that 'I should cause no harm to any being in any manner' - he will have no feeling of hatred to any being or to the society - what is inside him namely the absence of a feeling of enmity achieved as the fruit of *Sādhana* should not be shown externally as love.

But that state in which love gets generated only if he gives that amruth to someone and through that he gives himself he can thin himself so that he is able to enter the door of hrudhayam. Who is that one? It is *āthmā* only. When talking of *mumukshuthā* it was said that it is the *āthmā* which is to be 'selected' or 'chosen'. It should be selected with surging love and the attitude of surrender that he would offer himself to the *āthmā*. Love should be shown with the attitude that it should be not only to offer refuge but to 'kill' the 'individual 'I' which remains separate. The *āthmā* should be 'selected' with great love. It is here that love becomes bhakthi.

Love shown to the highest thing is called bhakthi. The love shown to equals is friendship, that shown to elders whether they are noble or not is respect. The love we show to those who are younger and those below us is grace. Love shown to those are in distress is compassion. The love we show to the eminent persons in the attitude of humility is bhakthi. Since the highest of all the eminent is only the Lord, we say in particular that to be obedient to him and to show love to him is bhakthi. Then there is guru bhakthi, *māthru* bhakthi, *pithru* bhakthi, *dēsa* bhakthi etc. Out of these it is only the Lord and the Guru who can take the 'individual - I' which we offer and dissolve it in the 'only I'.

Yet since it is said that the *Sādhakā* of the *jñāna mārgā* has to get hold of the Lord not as *Saguṇa* but as '*Nirguṇa āthmā*' he has to show that love - bhakthi - to that *āthmā* only.

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BHAKTHI OF THE NIRGUṆA AND SAGUṆA FORMS

Since we have spoken of the functions performed by *āthmā* like announcing itself, acting as the refuge of the one who surrenders etc a question may arise 'is it a *Saguṇa* and not actionless *Nirguṇa*? If it is *Saguṇa* that is not our goal. It cannot be like that'.

It is here that *śraddhā* should be brought in. That is why *Āchāryā* who shows us the way with great compassion has, right in the beginning, kept it (*śraddhā*) as a bodyguard for our protection. 'Do not raise questions about *Saguṇa* and *Nirguṇa*. When the Upanishad which speaks at length about *Nirguṇa āthmā* has said like this here accept it with total faith and give yourself to the *āthmā* with love. Since all the Upanishads say that later it reaches you only to *Nirguṇam* proceed on the basis of *śraddhā*' - one should tell oneself like this and do with faith.

You may assume that just at that time only the *Nirguṇa* Brahman showers its grace as *Saguṇa* and pushes you inside and there makes you united with *Nirguṇa* only. But the best thing is to proceed with *śraddhā*.

Even if a little room is given to *Saguṇa* the mind will immediately go after its infinite auspicious qualities, the joy of its sports etc and lead to 'dwaitham'. However good it (*saguṇa*) may be do not forget that your goal is Adhvaitham.

It is true that the thought of (*Saguṇa* Brahma) *Īśvarā* will not fail to arise. So long as there is thought when something good is thought about how can the thought about *Īśvarā* be avoided who has all those good things? Can the Adhvaitha *Sadhāka* avoid thinking about him whom all the religions except Adhvaitha *siddhāntā* talk of as being the ultimate? The thought will come. When that comes he should be prayed to with gratitude: 'It is by your grace my mind has turned to Adhvaitham. It is by your grace that in a small way I am doing whatever needs to be done for that.

You are making me do all this because of your supreme grace that this child should be united in you, the *Nirguṇa Swarūpam* in the end. Therefore if now I begin to worship you in *Saguṇa* it appears to me that I do so this denying your grace and sankalpa. Instead of my going like that shower your grace so that I will follow this path only' and turn the chiththa to *Nirguṇa* Brahman.

Gratitude - This is very important. The feeling of bhakthi arises now and then out of gratitude to him that he only has turned us to the great Adhvaitha. Still we have to maintain that bhakthi only for sometime and turn to our path. Even so all the bhakthi worship we had done in the beginning cannot hold a candle to this. Bhakthi practiced continuously in the beginning was more of a routine and not full of substance. But now when going on the path of *jñāna*, suddenly for a change there comes a flash of bhakthi, that too with gratitude and though it is momentary it will be full of substance.

Since the goal is *Nirguṇam*, chiththam has to be turned to that.

In the beginning stage (not the very beginning but the beginning of the state of ripeness) if it is felt that love should be shown to a *Saguṇamūrthi*, there is the guru for that purpose. Pour your bhakthi to him. Give yourself to him. He will raise it so that you will be enabled to show bhakthi to *Nirguṇa*. '*Prasādhēna guṇoh sēyam pravruṭhthā sūyathē palam*' is what *āchāryā* himself has said.

What is love? Is it not just getting hold of something? But taking hold of a thing is not to make it our own. It is an attachment combined with the thirst that it should make us its own. I mentioned about the 'individual I', the *ahankāram*. The attachment to a thing with the thought that the *ahankāram* should go is also love, bhakthi.

When it is said that love or bhakthi is to be deeply involved in something it does not mean chess or cricket or even being a bibliophile because these are all for the satisfaction of the 'individual I', that is to fatten it. We talk of swayam. Instead of being involved in something to feed that swayam, if we involve in something to give away that swayam itself as food it is love, bhakthi. I have said that *āthmā* should be 'selected' (swayamvara of *āthmā*). This is a swayamvaram in which the 'Varan' eats away the 'Vadhu' as food and remains!

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A PLEASING LOVE WHICH IS FULL OF LIFE

There is another aspect to this. That for which we have attachment is one with life; our life tries to get related to it in the name of involvement; love is to become that itself. Life! That is important. We talk of a friend being our life itself. Thus life joining another life is love. Is there life in chess or cricket?

There are some who practice music, dance, literature etc by dedicating themselves to them, treating them as *dēvathā* with life. When they touch the peak, for instance in music, we say they sing forgetting themselves. What does it mean? For that moment they give themselves - the separate 'I' - away to that art. Since that art has life it enters into them and makes them reach the high point in it.

When it is said that even in science people like Einstein make discovery in a state in which they forget themselves - by intuition - how is that? If it is said that they do not think of science as a *dēvathā* with life in the manner of the artiste: is there not a 'great life' above all lives? Is that not the root for all arts, *jñāna*, activity etc? That 'great life' will appreciate their dedication to science and make known to them a truth through intuition which is above the

function of their small intelligence. It may happen in cricket and chess too if the dedication is complete. But in such things there will not be the beauty of the life dedicating itself, the other life announcing itself and claiming relationship.

In the entire process starting from *nithyānithya* *vasthu* *vivēchana* and then on to *vairāgya*, *dhamam*, *samam*, *uparathi* etc everything is treated as something inert (*jadam*), the aspirant himself becoming like a *jadam* and there is no beauty of a life having relationship with another life. That path appears very dry. That path will end in the 'sūnyam' of Buddhism. But the Brahman of *Vēdānthā* is not sūnyam. It is the whole (*pūrṇam*). It is wholly 'rasa'. The Upanishad itself says - *Jīvan* attains that which is entirely *rasa* and becomes blissful*

(**Thaithirīyam* II. 7)

That is 'chith *vasthu*' which is full of light. It is said to be '*chithānandha rasam*', '*chithānanda pūrṇam*' etc. Bhakthi has been brought here for thinking of that as such 'life' with the thought that it must have relationship with us and dissolve us in itself. Bhakthi is for making the dry *Sāadhanā* cool by the water of bhakthi.

When it was kept as a dry one that was also all right. There is a method of treatment by which a sick person is made to starve and then the medicine is given. There are some crops which are kept dry for sometime and then watered and helped to grow well. Here too it is like that. Since we are in a state in which in the mind and buddhi the thoughts feelings and decisions keep cropping up only as food for '*ahankāram*' food has to be refused and it (*ahankāram*) has to be kept dry. It is by doing that, love will generate by which *ahankāram* itself can be given as food to another. At that time it should be converted to bhakthi to Brahman which is the only light or 'the great light'.

Bhakthi should be practiced through *āthmā* which is Brahman, to *Saguṇa Īśvarā*, to the guru and one other thing also. Later we are going to have *Upadēsam* of *Mahā Vākya manthrā*. We are going to make deep study of Upanishad and other spiritual *sāsthrās*. We should understand that these *manthrās* and philosophical truths are also full of life - instead of thinking of them as just alphabets and matter learnt through them - and divinity; like the form of idols these are also as the forms of akshara into which life has been infused and should be used in the manner of having a relationship with them. We have to establish relationship with them with love in the thought that these also take us to the place where we become dissolved and do bhakthi to them. The philosophical truths which are given as *Upadēsa* by the guru and which we have to meditate upon are not dry philosophies as generally thought to be. We should understand that they are equal to *dēvathās* with life and practice bhakthi to them. We have been till now practicing *Sāadhanā* in a dry manner. In the third stage which is coming, *sravaṇam*, *mananam* and *nidhidhyāsanam* are to be practiced with bhakthi.

If we know that what is to be done first hereafter is *sanyāsam* it will appear that this stage is going to be dry. But actually it is not so. It will be dry for all external appearance and for the external world. It is the stage in which the world is totally discarded as *māyā lōkam*. But inside it is cool amruth of love. Outside it is dry coconut but inside it is cool water. *Āchāryā* with compassion has shown the state for that amruth of love (*prēmāmruth*) to ooze in that thing which is inside all things.

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FOR THE REMOVAL OF HAUGHTINESS ALSO

It is one thing that the aspirants should not become dry. Another is that he should not develop ego; ego, self praise, notions

of honour and dishonour should not develop. Leave aside the going away of the *ahankāra* which is part of the *anthahkaraṇam* - that is a big thing which is to take place at the end. What I am referring to now is what is popularly called *ahankāram*. To distinguish it from *ahankāram* (in the *anthakaraṇam*) we may call it '*ahambhāvam*' - haughtiness. But in the books of *sāsthrās* no such difference is made. We may use it for the purpose of clarity. I think the thought of 'I' is referred to as 'egoism' and *ahambhāvam* as 'egotism'. If the thought 'we have gone beyond the stage of *mandha*, *madhyama* and above *karmā* - *bhakthi* and we are progressing in the path of *jñāna*' arises that is the end of the whole thing. In order too that it does not happen and to create the wealth of humility, *Āchāryā* has kept *bhakthi*. It will make one very light. Since *jñāna* has been given a high status by saying that it is only for the '*uththama ādhikari*' he should not become proud by that and the weight of that should not spoil the *Sāadhanā* and therefore to keep him on the alert the humility of *bhakthi* becomes necessary. There should be the humility that however much we may 'select' the *Brahmam* with love, unless the *Brahmam* reveals itself there is no redemption. With these thoughts, it is *bhakthi* which will help in creating the humility with which one will lie low before the goal. It is not only in respect of the highest experience. It is only when there is the humility to think 'all the fruits gained till now through *Sāadhanā* are because of the *Paramāthmā*'s grace. We have only made the efforts; fruits are from *Paramāthmā*. It is because of that grace we thought of making the efforts and continuing with it' it will be possible to sacrifice the important 'possession' namely haughtiness to become a *sanyāsi*.

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AHANKĀRAM IN SĀDHANĀ : TWO STAGES

'To show love or to have relationship there should be two persons. Therefore it is '*dwaitam*'. It should not come near

Adhvaitha *Sāadhanā* - this is the general view. After commencing *Sāadhanā* it will be like that (showing love will mean dwaitam). If love is understood to mean being agreeable to some one and action is based on that it should not come near. Then it is only by doing *Sāadhanā* and becoming refined, real love can be known. It will then be known that the relationship being established is not 'dwaita' but the one who claims relationship will give himself away to the thing with which relationship is claimed, get dissolved and it will be known that it is not two but only one. He would have attained the ripeness to practice what has been learnt. It is there that *Āchāryā* has given the name bhakthi to love. If that continues to be practiced the ripeness will become more ripe and then it will be dissolving without there being two.

With what objective does one commence *Sāadhanā*? He does it with the object 'I must attain Brahman. I must become Brahman myself'. Then he continues to practice. But when he attains the goal does someone who is 'I' become Brahman? No, not at all. There is none to claim the 'I'. Brahman alone is there. There will be *sākshāthkāram* only if the 'I' goes. In fact even to talk of *sākshāthkāram* is only a formality. To say that one has *sākshāthkāram* of Brahman is itself wrong. No one can do anything with Brahman. What happens is that at the final state he himself ceases to be. One who did *Sāadhanā* ceases to be at the end of it and the goal of *Sāadhanā* alone remains. This is what one great person* describes as a doll made of salt attempting to find the depth of the ocean.

(*Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa)

With the eagerness and desire that it should swallow him, he should prepare to sacrifice himself. That is a higher grade bhakthi mentioned here.

Sāadhanā is commenced with the 'I' : 'I should get released, I should attain Brahman, I should become Brahman'. But if that 'I'

is to be sacrificed at that stage it would not have been possible. The very thought of it will create fear too. Many among the Westerners who are highly intellectual and are courageous when they are told that the 'jiva bhava' - the feeling of 'I' - should be destroyed, express fear 'Oh! No! How to sacrifice the individuality?' It is true that even if one is not afraid from the beginning the jiva bhava will not go away immediately. That will go only if the old impressions are exhausted. It is only with that 'jiva bhava' they have to be removed. That is why the *Sādhana Chatushtayam*. The effort should be made to attain *vivekam* and then reach the state when *vivekam* has been gained to some extent. All this is done with the 'I' as the base. It is to encourage us in the effort the feeling of 'individual - I' could be there. It is not wrong. It is not only for giving encouragement to progress. It is also for making correction when a slip occurs by feeling regret for it. It is only if there is the separate 'I' the thought will come 'I have slipped and fallen'. From now on I should practice with greater care.' If on the basis of foolish *Vedānthā* it is thought 'After all 'the individual - I is false. What is there to slip or to be steady?' there will be no progress at all. If the highest state namely 'I am not' is merely imagined but the old impressions keep bothering and yet if he remains thinking that his efforts are not necessary to remove them it will all be waste. When there is a *Sāadhanā* is it not for the '*ahankāra* - I'? Otherwise it will mean that it is for the *āthmā*. Has the *āthmā* to do *Sāadhanā* to attain itself? That is as itself without doing anything. Therefore the individual jiva with the *ahankāram* which is the cause of that 'I' should continue with the *Sāadhanā*.

Yet, later when success is achieved in the efforts to control the mind, buddhi etc rejecting what all is to be rejected, receiving *Upadēsa* about *āthmā* which has to be reached and reaching the state in which the thought is only on that, *ahankāram* also has to be discarded as one of those to be discarded. What all is to come hereafter is not what he acquires as the achievement of the *jīvā* but

what he does to dissolve himself by the grace of *Paramāthmā*. That is why *Āchāryā* has ended *Sādhana Chathushtayam* with *Mumukshuthva*. Whatever happens thereafter is not what he acquires; they are what he has to do to give himself up : *Śravaṇa manana nidhidhyāsanam*.

The firecracker is stuffed with explosives. It is given a beautiful appearance with ornamental paper covering etc. All this is done only for the wick to be lighted, the cracker to explode and disappear into nothing. It is in the same manner that all *Sāadhanā* is practiced using the *ahankāra* to finally reduce it to zero and make it disappear. Although right from the beginning everything is taking place only due to (*Paramāthmā*'s) grace what was important then was the *Sāadhanā* for the *jivāthmā* to strengthen itself. For that to happen grace also was of help. By now the purification process is mostly over. The *anthahkaraṇam* which has been purified has to go step by step to attain the experience. Strangely 'attaining' is actually 'going' or as *Mānickavāchakar* said, in a commercial way, it is giving the 'jiva *bhāva*' and getting the state of *Siva* (*Siva sthithi*). It is only as bhakthi or in a poetic sense we can understand it this way. Actually jiva does not get *Sivan*. The *jīvā* goes and *Siva* remains.

It is only for attaining ripeness for the destruction of *ahankāram* that bhakthi is being kept. *Āchāryā* laid down the rule 'You have done *Sāadhanā* and acquired the wealth of shadgam, the wealth of *vairāgyam* and *vivekam* etc. Hereafter you should learn to give and become empty. Therefore I have prescribed bhakthi'.

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BHAKTHI AND HRUDHAYAM

When humility and love are born of bhakthi and they begin to grow, *ahankāram* will suck the mind and buddhi which have been made lean by the *Sāadhanā* done till now and take them to the

hrudhayam. It is known to everyone that in bhakthi - the true bhakthi which is 'āthma nivēdhanā', that is the *jīvāthmā* offering itself as *nivēdhanam* to *Paramāthmā* - buddhi has no work. Not only that there is no work for the mind either. The mind is 'sankalpa' and 'vikalpa'. Both of them have no work in true bhakthi. That is the state in which one leaves to 'Thy will'. The feeling of bhakthi is not one of those feelings which the mind gives rise to and enjoys. *Vātsalyam* (affection or fondness) 'madhuram' (prema or love) 'dhāsyam' (attitude of service) etc are said to be different forms of expression of bhakthi. But these will vastly differ from the *vātsalyam* of a mother to a child, the *prēmā* between the husband and wife and the attitude of service of a servant. Is there not so much difference between the *vātsalyam* that a mother shows to her child and the affection she shows to the neighbour's child? The difference will be much more in the case of her *vātsalyam* and the bhakthi *vātsalyam* of a devotee to *Bhagawān*. It is the same with regard to *prēmā* and *dhāsyam*.

Thus true bhakthi is not the activity of the mind. It arises from *ahankāram* when it is as the steady and root feeling of 'I' and the mind is also completely quiet. Also it is not for feeding the *ahankāram* and making it grow but to make it lean, get into the 'āthma sthānam' and make it dissolved in the original root.

What is not to be forgotten is that this bhakthi which comes in the context of the goal of adhvaitham is not like the ordinary bhakthi which has for its goal the enjoyment of its different expressions. In that case for that enjoyment it will be necessary for the 'I' of a *jīvā* to be there. Those whose *siddhānthā* is that bhakthi is the end in itself and it is *Mukthi* will say like that. But here the basic thing that for doing bhakthi permanently the *ahankāra jīvā* also should be there goes. Here the object is to dissolve *ahankāram* by love. If it goes on dissolving ultimately nothing will remain to

get dissolved. When it gives itself in bhakthi, *ahankāram* becomes leaner and leaner in its place namely the hrudhayam and only bhakthi will permeate it and hrudhayam will become the place of bhakthi.

Wherever in the Upanishads mention has been made of hrudhayam - the place of *ahankāram* - *Āchāryā* would have referred to it as 'lump of flesh'. But because he has said like this it should not be thought that it is entirely a physical organ. That is why it is said to be 'a place which is like being physical'. The hrudhayam (heart) which circulates blood is entirely physical. But this one is in between physical and subtle. Many of the 'chakram' and '*nādi*' mentioned by *yōgis* are entirely subtle. They cannot be filmed by any x-ray. This hrudhayam also is similar. But it is not that subtle. It is this hrudhayam which holds together and controls the blood circulation taking place due to the physical heart, the breathing that takes place due to the physical lungs, the movement of the *nādi* according to the command of the physical brain, the several activities taking place in the digestive organs etc and gives them the life energy. It does the act of controlling with the *nādis* that go out from it. What can take place in the body of a *jīvā* without the feeling of 'I'? That is why this power has been given to the hrudhayam which is the place of *ahankāram*. Probably because matters connected with the physical body are important for the *jīvā* and the hrudhayam has to control them this is kept as 'semi' physical.

When *Sādhana* is done to dissolve the *ahankāram* that which is physical to some extent, will become subtle so as to be called '*ākāśam*'. '*Āthma sthānam*' is as the causal *ākāśam* which is still more subtle - as the central hole of hrudhayam. Nothing physical or semi-physical can go directly through that hole which is subtle. It is only by making it lean it can be made to enter. Bhakthi does that function of thinning.

When bhakthi becomes ripe it is only love that will be shining above the flesh and *nādi* in the hrudhayam. That is why that itself (love) is called hrudhayam. Those who have no love, we call them those without a heart. Sometimes we talk of both together as '*prēma hrudhayam*'. It is to be noted that of the four organs of the *anthahkaraṇa* it is not the practice to equate anything with its place (*sthānam*). Although the place of the mind is the neck, do we refer to those with a good heart as 'good-necked'? In the same way we do not talk of those with good buddhi as those with good face. This is because the organs of *anthahkaraṇa* are in the physical parts of flesh just like someone seated on a chair. We cannot say that the chair itself is the person.

I have said that even hrudhayam, when it is semi-physical what is seated in it is *ahankāram*. But we do not call those who have too much '*ahankāram*' as those having hrudhayam. It is because love like atom has permeated into the subtle hrudhayam and nothing else is like this. Love is referred to as 'hrudhayam'. When we refer to *Bhagawān* as '*Hrudhayavān*' we do not mean to say that He is the one who is in the make-up of the '*ahankāra jīvā*' (in the semi-physical hrudhayam) but we say it in the sense that He shines brightly in the physical which has been made subtle by love which has peaked as bhakthi. Even if we do not know it in detail like this we say that He is manifest in the '*bhakthi prēmā*'.

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THE NĀDIS OF THE HRUDHAYAM; THE LIFE OF A JNĀNI SUBSIDING AND THE LIFE OF OTHERS DEPARTING

Here is a great fun! Many things which have no connection with love (*prēmā*) take place from the hrudhayam only. That is the wonderful *māyā śakthi* of *Īswarā*. That is because hrudhayam itself is the place of *ahankāram*. The reason is that the *nādis* which

conduct and control all the affairs of the individual *jīvās* start from that and provide the life giving energy to other parts of the body.

From this *hrudhayam* several semi-flesh *nādis* spread to all sides. Among them are those which end up in what are called the 'nava *dwārās*' - the nine holes. When human beings die, depending upon their *karmā*, for all people who are to take birth again, that is for most of us, life departs through one of these holes. Apart from these nine holes, there is an atom-sized hole in the crown of the head to all people. For all people life enters only through that when the body is in the womb as embryo. But when dying life goes out through all other holes except this to all those who are to have rebirth. Among those who have no rebirth, for all people except *jnānis*, life goes out of this aperture in the crown of the head. This is called '*kapāla mōksham*'.

When it is said 'except *jnānis*' what about the *jnānis*? Who are those other than the *jnāni* who do not have rebirth?

The life of a *jnāni* does not go out anywhere after the death of his body. He does not have the *mōksham* which is to be attained by the life going somewhere. *Mōksham* for him is not after death occurs. The moment he attains *jnāna*, that is he has had '*āthma sākshāthkāram*', the *anthahkaraṇa* which binds the mind dies and he gets released from *māyā* and becomes '*mukthā*' - *jīvan mukthā*. As he becomes *mukthā* even when he is with the body there is no question of his attaining *Mukthi* by life going somewhere after the death of the body.

But when he becomes a *mukthā* his life does not go out. Because he is in the state of *Mukthi* even when he is alive, he is called '*jīvan mukthā*'. Then, sometime later, death occurs. We need not go into such questions as to why he should live even after he has become a *mukthā* or when life will depart from his body etc. The important view is that he is alive for his '*prārabdham*'* to be

over even after attaining *Mukthi* and when that is over life also departs. To the question what happens to the life when the body dies the answer is : just as already the anthahkaraṇa has gone into the hole in hrudhayam and subsided in the '*āthma sthānam*' now when death occurs life also goes into that only and subsides. That is, when the *jnāni*'s body dies, his life does not go out through any *nādi*. Both in Upanishad and Brahma *Sūthram* this is made clear.

(* that part of the *karmā* of previous life which is ordained to give its fruits in the present life and starts giving fruits is *prārabdam*.)

Even according to general understanding it is not said that the *jnāni*'s life goes out but that it subsides.

Who are those other than the *jnāni* who will not have rebirth? In general terms they are called '*upāsakars*'. There are several types among them. What is common to all of them is : a conviction that everything does not end with this body and the world. All of them have definite belief that there is one supporting truth (*sathyam*). All of them have the thought that they should have release from the bondage of the world and attain *mōksham*. With this the common view ends. After this there are individual views in accordance with which there are different *anushtānās*.

One has the view of the Adhvaithi that the supporting *sathyam* is *Nirguṇam*. But he feels, as different from the Adhvaithi that there is a separate support for each *jīvā*. He does not think in the manner of the Adhvaithi that although it is *Nirguṇam* it is *Sathchithānanda Pūrṇam*. He thinks that it is something blank. Like Buddha he does not think there is no supporting *sathyam* and it is all *sūnyam*; he wants to destroy the mind for which he does *yōga anushtānam*. We call him a '*yōgi*'. He does think that individuality - *ahankāram* - must get destroyed. But he has not correctly learnt about the Supreme Truth which is one. He does

not also destroy the mind. He does not think like the one who follows the *jnāna mārḡā* 'we are not the mind. Are we not Brahman? Why are we being harassed by something that is not there? Let us constantly think of what the *Sruthi* says that we are only Brahman and put an end to the mind'. He feels that destroying the mind directly is difficult. Therefore he gives importance to the destruction of breath and with its help he does the destruction of the mind.

By doing like this, in a strange manner even though his goal of sathyam is 'Kaivalyam' which is a blank, the *sakthi* of breath joins its root, the *prāṇa sakthi*, that *prāṇa sakthi* joins *Mahā Prāṇa Sakthi* which is the root of all beings; because of that *sakthi* he acquires wonderful powers. He is also faced with the responsibility of taking care that he is not dragged by them resulting in his losing his goal.

Another has the view that the supporting sathyam is '*Saguṇam*' only. He thinks 'I should go and join it. I should reach to it but I should not become united with it. Because if I become united there will be no scope for enjoying its qualities. Since the *jivāthmā*'s most satisfying bliss is in such experience, to remain separate from it and enjoy it permanently is *Mukthi*'. Only if we show love to something we can experience it, experience what it does and enjoy the bliss. Therefore he practices love to it and all its aspects. We call him a bhaktha. His view is 'we need not have to become united with the *Paramāthmā*. In fact, there cannot be such uniting. *Paramāthmā* has not kept such a state of *Adhvaitham*'.

Another holds a still different view. He is not able to control breath and do *Sādhanā* or he is not inclined to do it. He is also not able to pour out his heart in bhakthi. But he also belongs to the category of *upāsakas* who want to get released from *samsāra* and the life of petty pleasures. Although he believes there is *Swāmi* he is unable to practice bhakthi emotionally or by *jnāna* through the

intellect or unable to hold on to anything whether *Saguṇa* or *Nirguṇa*. Therefore he keeps doing his 'swadharma' without desire for the fruits of his actions. He does all the *samskāra*s prescribed in the *Vēdhās* for the purification of a *jīvā*. In the present day world those who render service without any concern for personal gains can also be included in this category. Whether one does Vaidhika *karmā* or social service he must have the desire for release from *samsāra* - *mōksham*. Apart from not being concerned with personal gains he should not also be concerned about the gains that someone else will have due to his service. That is, service should not be done with the determination that it must have the result that one desires. It should be done with the determination that 'there is *Īswarā*. Anything will happen to anyone only according to his mind and his just decisions. We have no right to be obstinate with him to secure a particular result. We should go on doing what appears to be good and leave the fruit to that *phaladhātā*.' Such a person is called a *Karma mārgi* or a *Karma yōgi*.

From what I have said it will be clear that except the one who takes to the *jñāna mārgā*, those of the three main *mārgās* - *yōgi*, *bhaktā* and *karmi* - are *upāsakas*. Even those who are followers of other *siddhāntās* which do not question the *Vēdhās* and do not say that there is no such a thing as the supporting *sathyam* and it is *sūnyam* and follow their religion well can also be included in this category. All these people get released from *samsāra* after death. They are not born again. But the life which departs from their body does not immediately unite with the *Paramāthmā*. This is because none of them has thought of such *Adhvaitha* goal. They have not understood it and have not done what needs to be done for it. They have not desired it nor have they prayed to *Paramāthmā* for that.

Yet since these people desire to have release from *samsāra* and the cycle of birth and death and follow a good path for that purpose *Bhagawān* gives them that release only. He sends the life

which has departed from the body to Brahma lōkam (the world of Brahma). With that they get released from *samsāra* and the cycle of birth and death. That is, they attain *mōksha*. Instead of thinking of that world as the world of the Chathurmukha Brahma we can say that it is the world of *Saguṇa* Brahmam. Those who are knowledgeable call Brahma as '*Hiranyagarbhan*' and his world as '*Hiranyagarbha lōkam*'.

The intermediate stage between the stage of *Nirguṇa* Brahmam and the state of creation due to *māyā* is called '*Hiranyagarbhan*'. Even though creation does not physically come out it is the state in which the *Saguṇa* Brahmam keeps the creation within itself like garbham in the form of sankalpam. '*Hiraṇyam*' means 'gold'. Although *māyā* which is ignorance is like darkness, since it does this wonderful creation by the reflection of the Chaithanya (Consciousness) of the Brahmam that principle which is so reflected is called '*Hiraṇyam*'.

Just as one door serves as both entrance and exit, srushti which came out through '*Hiranyagarbhan*' goes back to that only. It will go when *Hiranyagarbhan* completes one hundred years of his life and he goes into *Nirguṇa* Brahmam and becomes united with it. One thousand Chathuryugam according to our calculation of time is one day time for him. There are one thousand *Chathuryugās* in the night. Thus his one day is two thousand *Chathuryugās* according to our calculation. He will live for hundred years made up of such days. During all that time, creation will be taking place. When he completes hundred years, he will be drawn into Brahmam. At that time along with him all creations, worlds etc will go and become united with Brahmam. Brahmam will be alone. Brahmam will be alone for the same long period during which creation had taken place. Then it will be srushti again.

The end of the life of *Hiranyagarbhan* and his going to *Paramāthmā* with all his srushti is called '*Āthyanthika Pralāyam*'.

Most of the *jīvās* who have the heavy load of *karmā* and who do not follow any of the paths - *karmā*, *bhakthi*, *yōga* or *jñāna* - and are born repeatedly and are dying have to take lakhs of births and suffer in this world. One who follows the path of *jñāna* becomes united with Brahman in this life itself. The others - those who are called *upāsaka* - escape from the cycle of birth and death but do not attain Adhvaitha *Mukthi*, go to Brahma lōkam and from there they go along with Brahma during '*Āthyanthika Pralāyam*' and get dissolved in Brahman.

The *Brahma lōkam* will be a world of purity, peace and happiness. For one who reaches there, there will be no desire, enmity, disease etc. This is generally so for all kinds of *upāsakās* who go there. Apart from this there will be different things for different types of *upāsakās*. One who had followed the *karma mārḡā* will have all his desires fulfilled provided they are without *dhōsham*. The one who has followed the *bhakthi mārḡā* will get the *lōka* of his Ishta Deivam. When it is said Brahma *lōkam*, it does not mean that only Brahma is there. If the different *bhaktās* talk of their *Vaikūṇṭam* or *Kailāsam* this is the *lōka* which appears to them like that. It is one *Paramāthmā* only who will show Himself as *Vishṇu*, *Siva* and other deities.

Looking at it this way Brahma is not Ishta *Dēvathā* for anyone! If it is asked why then the *lōkam* is named after Him, we may say that the very fact that he is not Ishta Deivam for anyone is the reason! Why I say like this is : In *Sāsthrās* the attainment of this *lōkā* is said to be particularly for the one who has performed the Vaidhika *karmānushtānā* without desire for fruits and only with a view for attaining *mōksham*. Not only in Upanishads but in Dharma *Sāsthrās* including Manu Smruthi it has been said like this. For such a person there is no Ishta Deivam to which he does *bhakthi*. Therefore keeping in view the fact that he returns to the roots from *srushti* what is like the door between the two has been named after the *Srushti Karthā*. This is also useful in another way - if it is

named after a particular Ishta Deivam those who have other Ishta Deivam may quarrel!

With some liberality we can add some others also in the list of upasakas. Although in ancient times only the *Vedhās* had spread all over the world they got distorted in other countries and when a stage was reached when there was no such thing as the Vēdhic way, some great men in those places founded different religions and philosophies. Such religions lay emphasis on *dēvōtion* to God, good conduct, meditation on the spirit etc. Those who follow those religions with *śraddhā* can also be said to be *upāsakas*, we can say that they too will go to Brahma lōkam and whatever be their belief - another world or the state of release - Brahma lōkam will be that for them. We can be still more liberal and say that even those who are followers of non-Vēdhic religions which took birth in this land - and were founded by great men who had condemned the *Vedhās* - and who consider their own religious founders with the same regard that we consider our rishis and *āchāryās* may also attain Brahma lōkam.

It should not be thought that all those who follow the bhakthi *mārgām* will have only 'dwaitha *mōksham*' in their 'Ishta Deiva lōkam'. That is said only about those who are circumscribed by a philosophy which is not Adhvaitha. But when bhakthi is practiced in a spontaneous manner, it cannot be subject to the limitation of any *siddhānthā*. Those like *Āzhwārs* and *Nāyanmārs* need not have to go by *Visishtādhvaitha* or *Saiva Siddhantha* but will allow free flow to their bhakthi. Some bhakthas who were like that had thought that it was not enough if they practiced bhakthi by being different from *Bhagawān* but had the uncontrollable urge to be united with him and have poured out such thoughts in their songs. There are also those who have sung about their having achieved that state of Adhvaitham. Such persons who have gone from bhakthi to *parā*-bhakthi will not gain the *Saguṇa* Brahman in Brahma lōkam but will attain Adhvaitha *Sakshāthkāra Mukthi*.

Even if one does not do Adhvaitha *Sādhana* but prays to *Īśwarā* that He should grant him 'Adhvaitha *mōksha*' and practices bhakthi, He will grant him the Adhvaitha *Mukthi* which is higher than the Brahma lōkam. What the person of *jñāna mārḡā* attains through *Sādhana*, the *bhaktā* attains through prayers as *Īśwarā*'s prasād. But some elders of our Adhvaitha *sampradhāya* are of the view that *Īśwarā* will not give him Adhvaitha *mōksha* directly but will turn him to the *jñāna mārḡam* and enable him to attain siddhi.

Of the several *yōgās* which are in practice there is one in which the supporting *śakthi* (*ādhāra śakthi*) is held and taken through the '*Sushumnā nādi*' from one chakram to another and at the end through that *śakthi* inseparably joins with the *Sivam* which is Brahman. In this, *Mukthi* is of the Adhvaitha form. Therefore we can say that such *upāsakās* also will have Adhvaitha *Mukthi* and will not go to Brahma lōkam.

There is a view that the '*ashtāṅga yōga siddhās*' whose goal is *samādhi* in '*Nirguṇa Thathvam*' also attain Adhvaitha *Mukthi*. But *Gītā* does not support this view. We cannot accept something as being higher than Krishna *Paramāthmā*'s pronouncement. All the scholars of all *sampradhāyās* are aware that He calls only the *jñāni* as *Sāṅkya* and *sanyāsi*. He has said that only these persons who follow the Adhvaitha path become '*Brahmabhūthar*' while in this world and attain '*Brahma nirvāṇam*' (V-24) when the body falls. To become *Brahmabhūthar* is also *Brahmanirvāṇam*. Since he is in *Mukthi* even when the body is there, in order to distinguish it he has said '*Brahmabhūthar*'. To make this clear he has said : '*Abhithō Brahmanirvāṇam varthathe*' (V-26). The *jñāni* attains *Brahmanirvāṇam* both in this world and the other.

He has also said what those who follow the *Yōga mārḡā* - *Ashtāṅga yōgā* etc - attain. The *yōgi* referred to by him is one who has controlled the breath and the mind. In addition, he has bhakthi also. Instead of doing a little *dhyāna* on *Īśwarā* for gaining

concentration as laid down in *Yōga sāsthā*, he always meditates on *Bhagawān*. Krishna says about him 'Mām anusmaram' (VIII-13) and 'Sathatham yō mām smarathi nithyaśah' (VIII-14). Such a *yōgi* even if he gives up the body when meditating on *Prañava* which the *Vēdhās* say is 'Sabhdha Brahman' he does not immediately attain *Adhvaita Mukthi*. This is what *Bhagawān* says in the *Akshara Brahma Yōgam*. He has said that his life goes to *Brahma lōkam* when the Sun is in the northern (*Uththarāyaṇa*) transit (VIII - 24).

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DEATH DURING UTHTHARĀYAṆAM - THE CORRECT MEANING

Talking of death during *uththarāyaṇam* is fairly popular. But the generally held view about it is not correct. What I am going to tell you may surprise you. But I am telling only what *Āchāryā* has said in his *bāshyam*. *Āchāryā* has not interpreted 'death during *uththarāyaṇam*' as 'death occurring during the six months period from 'Pausha' to 'Mithun'. That *yōgi* (all *upāsakās* like the *Nishkāmakarmi* and *bhaktā* except the *jñāni*) after life has gone through the *nādi* that goes from the heart to the head, goes to *Brahma lōkam* via the divine route called '*Dēvayānam*'. Before reaching the terminus there are several junctions! Each one of them is the place of a *Dēvathā*. The first is the place of Agni. Then it is the place of the *Dēvathā* of daylight; then it is the place of the *Dēvathā* of *Śukla paksha*; then the place of the *Dēvathās* of the 'uththarāyaṇa period' - note carefully it is not *uththarāyaṇa* period but the *Dēvathās* of that period. Like this he passes some junctions and then reaches the terminus. This is what *Āchāryā* says. *Bhagawān* also has said, following what has already been said in *Chāndōgyam* and Upanishads like *Bṛuhadhāranyakam*. *Āchāryā's* *bāshyam* on these and the *Brahma Sūthram* and the *bāshyam* on it make it clear beyond doubt.

In the same manner for those who have rebirth, death during *Dakshināyanam* means their life going on the *Pithruyānam* where the *Dēvathās* of that period '*Dakshināyanam*' are there. It does not refer to death occurring during the six months period from *Āshāda* to *Mārgaśīrsh*.

The *jñāni* is not connected at all with going via the route of the *Uththarāyanā Dēvathā*, reaching the Brahma lōkam and getting united with Brahman during pralaya. Therefore looking to the month of the death of a *jñāni* and saying that 'it is not *Uththarāyanam*. If so has he not attained *Mukthi*?' is not correct.

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TWO DIFFERING FRUITS OF KARMA YŌGAM

I have repeatedly said that if *Karma yōgam* is done properly chiththam will get purified and then one will become qualified to take to *Jñāna yōgam*. If such a *karma yōgi* starts *jñāna yōgam* in this life or in one or two subsequent lives he will attain Adhvaitha *Mukthi*. When that is so, if now it is said that *karma yōga* itself is one of the forms of *Upāsana* and that instead of his taking to *jñāna yōgam* he will go to Brahma lōkam and will get Adhvaitha *Mukthi* only after crores of '*kalpās*' at the time of '*Āthyanthika Pralaya*' how is this to be understood?

This is what it is : It depends on his goal, what he wants. If he is keen about Adhvaitha *Mukthi* but since he has not ripened enough to take to *jñāna yōgam* and therefore follows *karma yōgam* to get qualified for it, then as soon as he attains purification of chiththam he will take to *jñāna mārgā*. Then he will quickly attain Adhvaitha *Mukthi*. But if he is not interested in *jñāna mārgā* and thinks 'I want to get release from *samsārā*. For that what I can do is only *karmānushtānam*' and does *karmā yōgam* and stops with that he will get only Brahma lōkam. As I mentioned earlier *Bhagawān* will not on his own give what is not asked of him.

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NĀDI GOING FROM THE 'HRUDHAYAM' TO THE HEAD - WRONGLY UNDERSTOOD

Even scholars who have written explanatory notes on Āchāryā's *bāshyams* to make them more clear do not have a correct understanding about the *nādi* that goes from the hrudhayam to the head. All of them think that this *nādi* is the *Sushumnā nādi* mentioned in *Yōga Sāsthrā*. But this is not the *Sushumnā nādi* which goes from the bottom of the spine (*Mūlādhāram*) to the head. What has been talked about in Upanishads and Brahma *Sūthra* and which we have discussed goes out from hrudhayam. *Sushumnā nādi* pertains to a particular *yōga*. Our *Vēdānthā* religion which is based on Upanishads does not go anywhere near such aspects. The *nādis* which according to *Vēdānthā* start from hrudhayam are connected with the conduct of the life of all people and the end to that life. What is best in them goes to the head. That has not been referred to as *Sushumnā nādi* anywhere in Upanishads or Brahma *Sūthram*. It has been referred to as '*Mūrdha nādi*' that is, what is in the head and what ends there. Āchāryā has also said like this only in his *bāshyam*. In particular, wherever this subject appears in *Chāndōgyam*, *Bruhadāranya* Upanishad and Brahma *Sūthra* *bāshyam* Āchāryā has not said *Sushumnā* at all. In *Gītā* also it is said : '*Mūrdhnyadhāyāthmanah prāṇam*' (viii-12)- when talking of taking the *prāṇa* to the head and the body dying through that - both in the original and the *bāshyam* - there is no mention of *Sushumnā*. When Āchāryā wrote *bāshyams* one after the other he has mentioned *Sushumnā* only in *Katōpanishad*, *Praśnōpanishad* and *Thaithirīyam* which are the first three. Also in *Thaithirīyam* he has talked of hrudhayam, the physical organ (heart) which all of us know and has said that it is necessary. The reason why he said like this is :

When the person who follows the *jñāna mārgā* at the height of his *Sādhanā*, practices bhakthi for the annihilation of

ahankāram, the mind and buddhi coming to the hrudhayam which is the place of *ahankāram*, the hrudhayam getting filled by the subtle bhakthi and thereby *ahankāram* becoming thin and then entering the central hole and subsiding there - all this process takes place without his being aware of it. When *āthmā* is said to be *Nirguṇam* the mind is not able to get a grasp of it since it is vague. Whatever the root for thoughts and breath is according to guru's *Upadēśam* he has to assume it is at that point and concentrate. He will have known from the guru that it is the center of the hrudhayam. But his chiththam (anthahkaraṇam) will not fully go there immediately and get stabilized there. Only the chiththa will become stable to some extent at the place he finds. It is only after the impressions are completely wiped out and *ahankāram* annihilated, it will be stable. He is not aware of the process related to hrudhayam and *nādi*. It will not come to his attention at all. His only attention, only aim will be in '*āthma spurāṇām*' really materializing in the place to which he is holding. It should be so. He will be aiming only at *sākshāthkāram*. He will be meditating on that only. If he looks to something as the path leading to it, it will only be distraction. If the attention is on the path the goal will be missed.

Supposing someone says that *Ambāl* has manifested at some place nearby, immediately, we will develop a mental attachment to that place. To make real what was mental we will just run. When we run like that we do not take notice of the type of the road, whether it is a metal road or a concrete road etc.

Therefore if we ask a *jñāni* who has attained siddhi about hrudhayam, *nādi*, the hole etc which *Vēdānthā* speaks about, he will say nothing. He who does not know anything about himself will, of course, not know about *upāsakās*, the ordinary people etc. One who does not know anything about the road by which he came will not know what all things were there on either side of the road.

It may be pointed out that the rishis themselves who were great *jnānis* have said all these things in the Upanishads. That is true. Once rishis had attained *jnāna* and the siddhi from which they can never slip *Paramāthmā* Himself disclosed to them the wonders and secrets of His creation and felt gratified. It is at that time that he himself has disclosed this process and also the process meant for upāsakās and the ordinary people. They in turn have disclosed all His sports and wonders to others.

When these matters reached others they had created some confusion. The touch of *māyā* is there in everything! If someone wants to go to a *jnāni* to have a confusion cleared, the *jnāni* does not know anything about these. Or he knows only to the extent the *Paramāthmā* has let him know. The *jnāni* also has no desire to know more than that. Because He (*Paramāthmā*) let him know to that extent he had just known it. He himself had no interest in it! When this is so the confused knowledge would have to prevail as the right thing.

In the same manner when all people were thinking that the 'Mūrdha nādi' going from the hrudhayam to head is *Sushumnā*, *Āchāryā* appeared on the scene. He was Sarvajna even at birth. Although there was nothing which he did not know, when he had come as a human being and was to guide the people he had to show as if he had learnt everything only through the guru. First as a *brahmachāri*, he studied several *sāsthrās* during *gurukulavāsam* and then received Brahma *Vidhyā Sāsthrām* from the *sanyāsa* guru. Then according to the guru's command he wrote the *bāshyas*.

When he wrote like that he did something with great humility. Although he had experienced everything and he was a Sarvajna he did not say anything on the basis of his own knowledge and experience but on the basis of *sāsthrās*, *sampradhāyās* and the conduct of the *sishtās* (*sishtāchāram*) as approved by them. He thought 'if we speak on our own authority it will be all right only if

what happens to me happens to others also. Will it happen like that? Is it not because Buddhism and Jainism were preached on the personal authorities of the founders, those religions went on the wrong way and we have come to set things right' controlled himself and allowed tradition itself to speak through him. At that time he thought 'in matters not connected with spiritual development, even if the traditional belief is not all right I should not interfere with it. If I do it, it will become a license to others to do so and discipline will suffer' and spoke according to beliefs which were prevalent in the society.

The matter regarding hrudhayam, *nādi* etc spoken of by *Vedānthā Sāsthrās* is one such. By knowing about them there is no spiritual gain; nothing is lost if they are not known. There is a big difference between this and the *Sushumnā* and other *nādis* of *Yōga Sāsthrām*. In *Yōga Sāsthrām* many things are said : 'Do the practice in this particular way, create the flow of life energy in such and such a *nādi* and gain such and such fruits.' There is in them something for spiritual advancement also. But as for as the hrudhayam, *nādis* and the center hole spoken of by *Vedānthā* are concerned, one cannot do anything to have any gain. His '*Jīvā bhāva*' will automatically join those *nādis* or the central place depending upon his life style, his *Upāsana* and *āthma vichāram*. In *Yōga Sāsthrā* one's life and *Sāadhanā* take shape by the flow of *prāṇa* by his efforts. But in *Vedānthā*, depending upon his life style and *Sāadhanās*, such a thing happens in the *nādis* etc without his control. Therefore he has nothing to gain by knowing those things. Nothing is lost even if we were to understand them wrongly.

The matter about the *nādis* of *Yōga sāsthrā* are like carefully going up a ladder. In that one has to carefully climb step by step by his effort. *Vedānthā nādis* are like a lift. It carries by itself. One who is in a lift has nothing to do nor need he know how the lift works. Even if he has wrong ideas of its functioning the lift will take him to where he has to go.

That is why when *Āchāryā* wrote *bāshya* in the early days he also described the 'Murdha *nādi*' as *Sushumnā* according to the idea prevalent among the people at that time.

He said it briefly and did not elaborate. Then when this subject came in a rather deep form in the *Chāndōgya* and *Bruhadhāranyaka* Upanishads and *Brahma Sūthram*, instead of saying *Sushumnā* he said merely 'the *nādi* going to the head'. Then also he did not clearly say that it is not *Sushumnā*. Also he left without changing what he had said in the earlier Upanishads as *Sushumnā*. He did not give importance to unnecessary things.

It may be asked why he has said what he considered right regarding *uththarāyaṇam-dakshināyanam* contrary to the popular view. The answer is : It is true that by knowing it one will have no spiritual gain. But if it is wrongly understood one may think that even an ordinary soul departing during *uththarāyaṇam* is noble (*uththama*). This of course does not matter. But even a *mahāthmā* who departs during *Dakshināyanam* will be considered an ordinary soul which will have to be reborn. *Āchāryā* thought that this will be blasphemy (*abhachāram*) and therefore he said what is correct.

When commenting on why *Bhīshma* was waiting for *uththarāyaṇam* (*Brahma Sūthram* IV-2-20) we see *Āchāryā*'s nobility. He says *Bhīshma* did it '*āchāra paripālānārtham*' - that is to show the common practice in the world, *Bhīshma* did like that.

Another fun is that *Sushumnā* is the name originally given for the 'Murdha *nādi*' mentioned in the *Vedānthā*. *Sushumnā* is one of the seven important rays of the Sun selected from out of crores of rays. Appayya *Dīkshithar* has mentioned this in his *sthōthrā* on the Sun. The rays of the Sun travel through the *nādis* of the *hrudhayam* mentioned in *Vedānthā*, spread all over the body and create the semi-physical fluids which are the base for blood, bile, phlegm etc. This is said in *Chāndōgyam*. Of these *nādis* it is the *nādi* through which the *Sushumnā* rays of the Sun flow, which goes

from hrudhayam to the head. That is how that *nādi* came to be called *Sushumnā* originally. The followers of *Yōga sāsthā* have kept that name for the central *nādi* which is important in the *yōgā*. Although originally it had connection with the Sun, people of the *Yōga sāsthā*, instead of giving that name to the *Sūrya nādi* of their *sāsthā* gave it to *Agni nādi* because it is central.

A reason could be said for *Āchāryā* who called it in *Bruhadāranyakam* and *Charidōgya* Upanishad and *Brahma Sūthra Bāshyam* as '*Mūrdha nādi*' having allowed *Sushumnā nādi* which he had used in the beginning to remain unchanged. Since he has used *Sushumnā* only in those three places he must have thought that by that everyone will understand that the *hrudhaya nādi* of *Vedānthā* originally had that name. Quite contrary to this, the impression had been gained in later years that in all other places he has referred only to the *Sushumnā nādi* of the *Yōga sāsthā*.

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THE BHAKTHI OF JNĀNA MĀRGĀ IS GREATER THAN THAT OF BHAKTHI MĀRGĀ

The question 'is there bhakthi in *jnāna mārḡā* also?' was raised and it was examined. It is this bhakthi which is useful to gain the most permanent *Adhvaitha mōksham* in this life itself. It helps to unite the *jīvā* with *Brahmam*, the supporting *Sathyam*. But the bhakthi of bhakthi *mārḡā* stops with joining the *jīvā* with *Saguṇa Brahmam*, the form that the supporting *Sathyam* has taken along with *māyā*. It is also not uniting with the *Saguṇa Brahmam* but being apart from it and enjoying it. For whatever period of time (crores of *kalpās*) such experience is enjoyed it is not permanent *mōksham* (although the founders of the bhakthi *mārḡā* say that it is permanent). But one day when the *Saguṇa Brahmam* is drawn into *Nirguṇa Brahmam* that experience comes to an end and thus the bhakthi of bhakthi *mārḡā* helps to take one to the *mōksha* which is

not permanent. The bhaktha may say 'let me keep doing bhakthi like this permanently'. But *Īśwarā* will say 'How will it be possible simply because you want to do it permanently? I feel that my disguise as *Saguṇa* Brahman is enough. A make-up cannot remain permanently. At some point the one in make-up will like to remove it and be oneself. I have now thought like this. I am tired of *līlā*. Now it will be rest for as long a period as I had remained in make-up'. *Īśwarā* will remove the make-up and be in *Nirguṇam*. When there is no *māyā* and *Īśwarā* where will *jīvā* be? Therefore the jiva also has to go with him to Adhvaitha *mokṣam* which is permanent. *Paramāthmā* will rest for the period of the life of Brahma - that is He will be by Himself in *Nirguṇa* state - and when sruṣṭi commences again the one who had attained Adhvaitha *Mukthi* will not be born in that sruṣṭi.

The important thing that has been learnt now is that bhakthi is dissolving with love the *ahankāram* in the basic (root thing) - *mūla* vastu. Since the thing which has to be reached is *Nirguṇam* there is no room for dissolving us in the divine qualities. Therefore it means dissolving in '*akhanda chaithanyam*'. '*Akhanda chaithanyam*' means the thing which is full of life and which is not limited by anything. One who follows the *jñāna mārgā* is keen to dissolve in it the 'I' which is the main root for the '*jīvā bhāva*'. He thinks like that without knowing that such thinking is real bhakthi. Without thinking of joining with a state which cannot be understood or joining with something which is blank or since there is nothing to join and it is *sūnyam*, to perish, anyone who has understood Adhvaitha *vidhyā* will practice it for dissolving in *sachithānandam* which is full of life and is whole (*pūrṇam*). When it is said that this life should dissolve in that life love will surge by itself without its knowledge. *Āchāryā* has said '*mokṣa kāraṇa sāmāgrayām bhakthirēva garīyasi*' in the thought 'why should such a good thing as love be practiced without knowing it? Because it is not known and Brahman is thought of constantly with intellect,

the intellect may itself drag away; it may block the way for opening the hrudhayam and practicing love and to cut off the root of *ahankāram* which has gone deep there. Therefore let us say it openly.'

I have said that bhakthi is dissolving *ahankāra* with love and joining the basic thing (*mula vasthu*). The love shown to the *Saguṇa* form of that *vasthu* has generally come to be called bhakthi and that path as bhakthi *mārgā* as distinct from the *jñāna mārgā*.

When a certain aspect (*bhāvam*) remains the same it does not shine. It is only when the *bhāva* branches out in newer and newer forms with life in the form of action it shines. Supposing we just keep prolonging one swara for example 'sa' or 'ri' how will it be? It is only when the seven swaras are used it is pleasant. Except when there is *samādhi* resulting from the subjugation of the mind if the mind functions even a little, the *bhāvās* that come up will not be shining unless they take new forms. 'Not seen' means it is not only for others; even that person will not know it consciously.

When it is bhakthi to *Nirguṇam* he is thirsting that his little life should dissolve in that great one. That thirst is like expanding a single swara. There is no room for variety. Making new things is the activity of the mind. But he is keen on destroying the mind. He has subjugated it with '*sāmam*' '*dhamam*' etc. So far as he is concerned even knowing it consciously comes under 'ego consciousness'. Therefore it is not desirable. Therefore he himself is not aware of the bhakthi aspect in this. What to say of others? Others will not at all know his bhakthi.

If we see whether that to which he practices bhakthi does anything in return and enlightens, that too is not. How can the *Nirguṇa* Brahman react? *Saguṇa Īśvarā* who controls the universe will appreciate his bhakthi and will keep on making him progress in attaining maturity. Since His object is not to turn him to *Saguṇam* He will do what He does without his knowing it. Thus this bhakthi

will be one-sided and that too without being known. Although this is the true and highest bhakthi which entirely dissolves *ahankāram* it is like this. It is a bhakthi which not only dissolves the *jīvā* but dissolves itself too! The bhakthi which infuses sacrifice in him is itself a '*thyāgi*' (one who sacrifices).

When it is bhakthi to *Saguṇam*, how is it? The attitude of bhakthi which one has to a *Saguṇa Mūrthi* which is the abode of infinite, auspicious qualities and is engaged in newer and newer types of activities, grows in different ways and there is room for it to spread with newer and newer taste.

As the quintessence of everything it is here the claiming of relationship with love shines brightly. For a *jīvā* to show love to *Nirguṇa Brahman* it is like trying to claim relationship with one who is in *Samādhi Nistai*. With *Saguṇa Mūrthi* it is possible to have relationship, thinking of Him as the Lord, son, mother, friend, husband etc. That attitude manifests itself in dancing, singing, bhajans, sankīrthan, pilgrimages, festivals, *upanyāsam* etc. Since practicing bhakthi is the very life of these *mārgās*, he does it very consciously.

On top of it *Bhagawān* who is the recipient of bhakthi also reacts. Although He may not manifest Himself before all *bhaktās* He gives *dharsan* to those who have reached the peak of bhakthi and shows them also several kinds of *līlās* and establishes the relationship with him with a love that is millions of times that of the bhakthi of the *bhaktā*. When people hear the stories of what He has done to the *bhaktā* they experience the joy of having established a relationship with him. To them also He will be extending His grace in a subtle manner while creating an impression on their mind.

When bhakthi is practiced to the *Saguṇa Brahman* in the state of duality, the attitude of bhakthi is clearly seen. That is why

it is called bhakthi *mārgā* and one who takes to that path is a *bhakthā* as different from the *jñāna mārgā* and the *jñānis*.

But when it comes to one giving oneself as *nivēdhanam* to *Paramāthmā* (*āthma nivēdhanam*) the person who follows the *jñāna mārgā* stands higher than the *bhakthā* of bhakthi *mārgā*. The *bhakthā* has completely destroyed his *ahankāram* so far as worldly things are concerned. Internally also by his great humility he has destroyed *ahankāram*. But he does not want to destroy the *ahankāram* which is like the main root of the *jīvā* inside the mind. He thinks that for maintaining the relationship with the *Saguṇa* Brahman and to enjoy its qualities the *ahankāram* of the individual *jīvā* must be there. Of the two, namely, *ahankāram* and *ahambhāvam* (egotism) he comes forward to sacrifice the second and not the first.

Therefore, even though *saranāgathi* (surrender) is mentioned in bhakthi *sāsthrās*, the one who follows the bhakthi *mārgā* does not do surrender in the form of '*āthma nivēdhanam*' but keeps for himself a little of the *ahankāra* of the individual *jīvā* only for enjoying the *Paramāthmā* and he surrenders only the rest. It is not total surrender. It is the followers of the *jñāna mārgā* who do not actually talk of surrender but make total surrender, give the *jivāthmā* as '*āhuthi*' in the 'Brahma agni'. This is true, complete *āthma nivēdhanam*, surrender, bhakthi, prapaththi.

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BHAKTHI ITSELF IS JNĀNA AS SHOWN BY KRISHNA

More than saying that bhakthi is the important means to attain *jñāna*, Krishna has shown that *jñāna* itself is bhakthi. He talks of four different types of *bhakthās* and gives them the names - *ārthan*, *jijnāsu*, *arthārthi*, *jñāni* - '*Ārthō jijnāsurāthārthi jñānī cha Bharatharshaba*' (Ch. VII-16). *Ārthan* is one who is in difficulty, who is suffering. *Jijnāsu* is one who wants to attain *jñāna*. *Arthārthi*

is one who desires to have money, house, position etc. *Jnāni* is a *jnāni*.

While placing the bhakthas in the order of the degree of their maturity the order *ārthan*, *ārtharthi*, *jijnāsu*, *jnāni* would be correct. But when these are put in the form of *ślōkā*, *jijnāsu* has been mentioned first and then the *ārthārthi* to suit poetic nicety in the formation of words. We are concerned here with the fact that he has referred to the *jnāni* as a *bhaktā* of the highest class. To forestall the possibility of the *jnāni* being interpreted as the *jnāni* of the *dwaitha* state, he says he has 'Ēka bhakthi' (Ch. VII-17) and then proceeds to say that it is his opinion that '*Jnāni* and I are one' :

'Jnāni thvāthmaiva mē matham' (Ch. VII-18).

Later when he gives *Upadēsa* of bhakthi *yōgam*, (worship of *Saguṇa* in the state of duality) he calls the bhaktha as 'priyah' - *athīva priyah* (XII 14-20). From the fact that he does not say 'I am he himself' it is seen that here he refers to the *adhvaitha jnani* only. In the *Upadēsam* of bhakthi *yōga*, he says 'for those who are conscious of their body *Sādhanā* in *Nirguṇa* path gives them suffering and speaks in detail on bhakthi which is worship of *Saguṇa*. It is clear that he is giving *Upadēsam* of *Saguṇa* bhakthi because the *jnāna mārḡā* is not easy for those who are conscious of their body and not because it is better than *jnāna*. Then he describes the characteristics of the *bhaktā* in seven or eight *ślōkās* starting with : *Adhvēshtā sarva bhūthānam*' (XII-13) - he should have no hatred towards any creature and ends the chapter with the words 'such persons are much beloved of me'. For those who see this from a neutral stand point it will be clear that all the characteristics mentioned here are those of the *jnānis*. In *Bhakti Yōgam* the Lord has not mentioned anything such as enjoying the qualities of *Bhagawān*, becoming emotional in the high state of bhakthi and crying, singing, dancing, fainting etc having relationship in the form of *dhāsyam*, *vātsalyam* etc. All that he says

namely that there should be compassion towards all creatures, being free from *ahankāram* and *mamakaram* (I and Mine) equanimity in joy and sorrow, being *dēvōid* of jealousy, fear, confusion etc remaining satisfied with what one gets are of the one who follows the *jñāna mārgā*. He has also spoken in another *ślōkā* which is like the description of a bhaktha in a general way.

*Machchiththā madgathaprāṇa bōdhayanthah parasparam
Kathayanthascha mām nithyam thushyanthi cha ramanthi cha*
(X-9)

‘Their mind is totally devoted to me, they consider me as their very life, conversing with each other about me always and enlightening each other, talking of my stories, feeling that as bliss and satisfying’. But this is not said in bhakthi *yōgam*. It is not even about those who are generally considered *bhakthās*. In *Vibhūthi Yōgam*, when saying that it is His glory that has permeated into everything, he says that the ‘budhar’ who have understood this devote their mind and life to him, speak about it and are dancing with joy’. ‘Budhar’ means those who follow the intellectual way. But instead of being dry *Vēdānthi* they are together with involvement and love. He calls them ‘*Bhāvasamanvidha*’. That is, they are those who are according to *Āchāryā*’s definition of one who follows the *jñāna mārgā*. When He speaks further on, the Lord does not say that he is going to give them *Upadēsam* of bhakthi *yōgam*. He has clearly said that he will bless them with *jñāna mārgā* which is *Buddhi Yōgam* and destroy whatever remains of the darkness of *anjñāna*.

Even in the last chapter he says ‘*bhakthyā mām abhijānāthi*’ (Ch.XVIII-55) - one who understands me correctly through bhakthi - this is related to *jñāna*. It is from the root ‘jna’ both *jñānam* and *jñānāthi* are derived. ‘Through bhakthi he understands me as I am, enters into me and by my grace he attains the imperishable permanent state’ - thus he has spoken the essence of

Adhvaitha. Continuing, He tells Arjuna also to be like that. He asks him to take up *Buddhi Yōgam* and not *Bhakthi Yōgam*.

Thus what everyone should understand is that it is not just the ringing of bells, offering flowers, trying to establish relationships in different ways etc but the highest form of *bhakthi* by which one offers oneself to the source of all life has an important place in *jñāna mārḡā*.

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THIRD STAGE

After having succeeded in *Sādhana Chathushtayam* the third stage is the final. It is the stage in which *anushtānam* is to be done after leaving home and everything and becoming a *sanyāsi*. The parts of this stage, namely, to receive *Upadēsam*, absorb what has been received and then do *Dhyānam* with the *anthahkaraṇam* fixed in it are necessary for people following any path and for those who begin at the bottom and make efforts at all stages.

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REUNUNCIATION

When we talk of Adhvaitha *Sāadhanam* the first step in that is *sanyāsam*. Therefore this has to be talked of (even though no one here will go for it). It is good to know about the ideal state of *sanyāsam* because even if others need not have to cut off all attachments etc whoever makes efforts for spiritual advancement by whatever path has to give up such attachment etc to some extent.

If the *āthmā* is to be realized one has to aim at it only, think of it and do what is necessary for it. If release is to be had from the power of *māyā* and the great *siddhi* of becoming *Brahmam* itself is to be attained it will not be possible unless one is totally dedicated

only to that goal, be attached to that only and direct all efforts towards that only. How can one do this even when having the other attachments and relationships? How can that *māyā* and this *jnāna* be together at the same time?

It is only after taking *sanyāsam* one becomes qualified to receive *Upadēsam* of the *Mahā Vakyā* of *Vēdhās* namely 'this *jīvā* is Brahman only'. Brahman also means *Vēdhā*. The *Vēdhās* which are Brahman proclaim through the *Mahā Vakyā manthrās* that *jīvā* is Brahman. Therefore these *manthrās* have special power. By merely knowing '*jīvā* is Brahman' and meditating on it the goal will not become actual experience. The attainment of the goal will become easy only if 'japam' of the *Vēdha manthrās* are done through the *Mahā Vakyā*, meditated upon internally. 'Easy' does not mean that it is very easy. It is only comparative. Being immersed in the thought of Adhvaitham and making efforts for *sākshāthkāram* is like one digging a well for taking bath. Attaining the same goal through the *Mahā Vākyās* of the Upanishads is like drawing water from an existing well. Only thing we have to do is to make the efforts of drawing the water. It is not like just turning a tap and water flowing. The size of the pot, the depth of the well etc change according to the *samskāra* of each one. Some people may have to work hard like drawing water several times with a small pot from a deep well. But if we compare all this to our having to dig a well ourselves?

This is 'protected' water. There is a watchman. Only if he allows we can take water. That watchman is the guru.

The *manthrās* which are the aggregate of sounds are those which give us benefits both here and hereafter by drawing the '*Paramāthma Sakthi*' and grace which remain spread in the space. The *manthrās* which are the crown of all such *manthrās* and unite the *Jivāthmā* with *Paramāthmā* are called *Mahā Vākyās*. *Āhāryā* has said (in his *bāshyam* on *Itharēya* Upanishad 1.3.13) about the

Mahā Vākyās that they are ‘*āthma jnāna prabhōdha kruch sabdhikāyām*’ - they contain the *sabdhās* which awaken the (Adhvaitha) *āthma jnāna* in the *jivāthmā* which is sleeping in *anjñāna*. He has said that just as a person who is asleep is woken up by beating a drum the guru beats the drum of *Mahā Vākyās* and gives enlightenment.

Such a guru will look to the fitness of a person and approve of him as a *śishyā*, give him *sanyāsa āsram* and the *Upadēsam* of *Mahā Vākyam*. ‘Fitness’ here means a person must have progressed to some extent in *vivēka*, *vairāgya*, *sama*, *dhama* about which we have seen earlier in the context of *Sādhanā Chatushtayam*.

There are 1180 *sakas* for the *Vēdhās*. Each of these has a Upanishad and each Upanishad has a *Mahā Vākyam*. Although there are more than 1100 of them, 4 *Mahā Vākyās* have been selected - one for each *Vēdhā*. From ‘*Viśwēswara Smruthi*’, ‘*Nirñaya Sindhu*’ (a compilation of Dharma *Śāsthrās*) and several other authorities mentioned in *śāsthrās* and from what has come through tradition it is seen that at the time of *dikshai* for *sanyāsam Upadēsam* of these four *Mahā Vākyās* are to be given. There is scope for the guru to give *Upadēsam* of some other *Mahā Vākyās* also. There is a tradition that the one who receives *dikshai* should receive one *Mahā Vākyā* additionally from the *sākā* to which he belonged in his *Pūrvāśrama* (before taking *sanyāsam*). There is also the practice of giving *Upadēsam* of ‘*Prañava*’ first and then the *Mahā Vākyās*.

Receiving *Upadēsam* like this is called ‘*Śravaṇam*’ in *Brahma Vidhyā Śāsthrā*. The direct meaning of *Śravaṇam* is ‘to listen’. There is a saying of great men : ‘*Sanyasya Śravaṇam kuryāth*’. That *Śravaṇam* has to be done only after taking *sanyāsam*.

The goal of this *Śravaṇam* is to attain *Mukthi* as *Nirgūta Brahman* remaining at one place and without going anywhere. Life

leaving via the path of the Sun (*Sūrya gathi*) and joining *Saguṇa* Brahman in *Brahma lōkam* is lower in merit. *Mundakōpanishad* says that even to attain that state one who is a *sānthan* and a *vidwān* and has matured has to go to the forest, live on *biksha* and do *thapas*. When that is so, it is clear that one who has to receive *Upadēśam* of *Nirguṇa* *Thathvam* has to take *sanyāsam*. The next *manthrā* speaks about him also. After examining everything in the world he feels and decides 'everything in this has the bondage of *karmā*. *Āthmā* which is our goal should not be caught in *karmā*. Therefore I will give up all *karmā*'. That is, he gets ready to become a *sanyāsi*. He wants to receive *sanyāsam* from a guru and therefore goes in search of him. It is to emphasize the fact that it has to be only through a guru, Upanishads say 'Gurum *ēva*'. *Āchāryā* has explained that even a '*sāsthrājna*' who knows everything should not think that he can by himself attain *Brahma Jñānam* and engage himself in that effort and therefore the Upanishads say 'Gurum *ēva*'.

In the later part of the same Upanishad it is said that it is not that only the one who is weak in spiritual matters and is bewildered cannot attain the *āthmā*; even the one who performs *thapas* cannot attain it so long as he remains 'alinga', that he does not have the sign for it. It is *Āchāryā's* *bāshyam* that 'alinga' is remaining without taking *sanyāsam*.

In *Bṛuhadhāraṇyakam* also the following qualification is laid down for a *sanyāsi*: 'One who desires the spiritual world leaves his home and goes as *sanyāsi*. This is because even in olden times, scholars who had practiced *āthma vidhyā* had just discarded all desires, children, property, the desire to go to *Dēva lōka* and set out as beggars'.

In everything there will be some aspect about which there will appear to be difference of opinion and then it will be reconciled. Thus in *Bṛuhadhāraṇyakam* itself in an earlier place it

is said '*āthmanam vidhithvā*' - that is 'knowing the *āthmā* and then discarding children, property, desire for other world etc they run like beggars'. When it is said 'after knowing the *āthmā*' it would appear to mean 'after gaining Self-knowledge'. This gives the impression that instead of the fitness for *sanyāsam* being the pre-requisite it is said that *sanyāsam* follows the gaining of Self-knowledge. But if we think about it deeply we will get the answer for this. That is : in the *manthrā* the question is raised 'How will the *jnāni* conduct himself?' and it gives the reply : 'He will conduct himself in whatever way he wants. Whatever it may be he is certainly a *jnāni*.' That means he is not bound by any rules of *sāsthrā* about how he should be. Is it not inappropriate that such a person should take to the last *āśrama* namely '*sanyāsa āśrama*'? Therefore 'knowing the *āthmā*' should not be understood to mean 'knowing by experiencing it' but 'knowing it by buddhi' and it will be clear that one who has studied the Adhvaitha *Sāsthrā* and heard them from others and is confirmed that it is sathyam discards all desires and becomes a *sanyāsi*.

When you offer '*Pūrṇa kumbham*' to me - or even when you make an offering to *Āchāryā* at the time of marriage etc in your homes - there is the practice of reciting a *manthrā**. In that *jnānis* are described as 'those whose anthahkaraṇa is purified by *sanyāsa yōgam*'. From this also it is seen that it is first *sanyāsam*, getting purified through that and attaining *jnāna* is after that.

(*Some *manthrās* which commence with '*Na karmaṇā*' - (*Mahā Nārāyaṇōpanishad* XII 3.4-7) and then the *manthrā* starting with '*Vedānta Vijnāna*).

The one who is in *sanyāsa āśramam* and the one who has gone above him and become a *jnāni* for whom *sāsthrās* are himself are called '*adhyāsrāmi*'. At the end of '*Śwethāswatharōpanishad*' it is said that *Upadēsam* of that was given only to such *adhyāsrāmis*. There is the Upanishad called '*Kaivalyōpanishad*'

from which *Āchāryā* used to quote. In the beginning of that it is said that the one of *adhyāśrama* goes to a secluded place, sits straight on a seat, controls his indriyas and meditates on the *ātmā* which is '*Śiva Swarūpam*'.

It is '*mananam*' and '*nidhidhyāsanam*' after '*smaraṇam*'. Just as it is laid down that *sravaṇam* can be done only after becoming a *sanyāsi* it is only the *sanyāsi* who is entitled to *manana-nidhidhyāsanam*. There is the statement '*mananāthou sanyāsinām adhikārah*'.

In Brahma *Sūthra*, *sanyāsis* have been referred to as '*oordhvarēthas*'. *Oordhvarēthas* means those who do not waste their energy on lowly matters connected with indriyas but take it higher. They are the *sanyāsis*. If we see the *sāsthrās* and *Āchāryā*'s *bāshyam* on that we will know that only they are qualified for the third stage (in Adhvaita *Sādhana*). It will be known that a *jnāni* will be and must be a *sanyāsi*.

Brahma *Sūthra* itself is called Bikshu *Sūthra*. Bikshu and *sanyāsi* are the same. Bikshu is one who lives on alms. The fact that a book meant exclusively for enquiry into Brahman has such a name shows that *sanyāsi* only is entitled to *sravaṇam* etc.

If something finds a place in *Gītā* no greater certificate than that is needed. If we try to find out whether in the opinion of *Bhagawān* it is the *sanyāsi* only who is entitled to *sravaṇam* etc we find it is so. *Bhagawān* says 'all *karmās* finally end in *jnāna*' and immediately after that He says 'the *thathva dharṣis* will give *Upadēśam* of *jnāna*. By doing service to them and offering obeisance to them they should be learnt properly'. When it is said '*karmā* ends' does it not mean *sanyāsam*? Does not the Lord mean that it is such a *sanyāsi* who is qualified to receive *jnānōpadēśam*?

In *Nārāyaṇavalli* (78th *anuvāgham* of *Mahā Nārāyaṇōpanishad*) several views have been expressed about the

Supreme Truth (para thathvam) like sathyam is thathvam, thapas is parathathvam; no, it is dhamam, samam etc and the greatness of each is mentioned. But in the end it is said 'none of these is parathathvam. Only *sanyāsam* is parathathvam. Brahma who is 'Para Deivam' has Himself said like that'.

In the *Sādhana* for knowing the *āthmā*, when going to the higher stages, it is only the *sanyāsi* who can give up *karmā*. *Āthmā* is a thing which *karmā* cannot touch. It can be known only by constant meditation on it and finally even the *karmā* of that *dhyāna* stops. If it is said 'I will continue with *karmā* and I will do *dhyāna* also' that will not work. So long as one remains with *karmā* several relationships will get attached to that *karmā*. The Lord has said '*Sangāth sanjāyathē kāmah kāmāth krōdhah*'. Once the relationship is established with something, *kāma*, *krōdha* will start from that one by one. Finally it will be '*buddhi nāśāth prañasyathi*' (II.62) - 'He loses intelligence and he is lost'. That is why *Āchāryā* has said '*karma kōtibhih na sakyah*' - 'even if we do crores of *karmās* bondage cannot be cut off' and says '*vivēka vijñana mahāsinā vinā dhathuh prasādhēna śithēna manjunā*'. (V.C.147) He says that it can be destroyed only by the wonderful sword of knowledge that comes of discrimination, sharpened by the grace of the Lord.

If life has to be dedicated only for cutting of the bondage it will not be possible unless one discards family, relationships, job and everything including the Vaidhika *karmānushtānas* and lives.

But one thing that should be remembered is that *Āchāryā* has not said that anyone can give up *karmānushtānā* and go away saying that he will take to *sanyāsam*. He has made the rule that only the person who has gained the purity of mind has the right to do it. He also said conclusively that it can be gained only by doing all the *karmānushtānās* without any lapse.

Having said that even by crores of *karmās* the bondage cannot be destroyed *Āchāryā* thought that those who have not attained maturity (*apakvi*) may take this as the clue, give up the *karmānushtānas* which are their *swadharma* and thereby become lost and therefore with compassion he makes things clear in the next *ślōkā*:

Sruthi pramāṇaika mathē swadharma
Nishtā thayaivāthmā viśuddhirasya
Viśuddha buddhēh Paramāthma vēdanam
Thēnaiva samsāra samūla nāśah (V.C. 148)

In the latter half he says 'it is only for the one who has gained purity of mind, *jñāna* dawns and by that the bondage of *samsāra* is destroyed with its root.' In the first half he says how that purity (*suddhi*) will be gained. He says that the mind gets purified only for the one who is involved in his *swadharma* firmly (in *nishtai*). If it is asked how to know what that *swadharma* is he has given the reply in the beginning of the *ślōkā* itself : *Sruthi pramāṇaika mathē* - He says that to have the faith that what the *Vēdhās* say is the authority, know the *swadharma* and practice it fully and become firm in that (be a *nishta*). The *swadharma* of the *Vēdhās* is - division of the society on the basis of *varṇa* and laying down who should do what *karmā*, what the *brahmachāri*, the *gruhastha* and the women should do etc. He says that only when the *karmās* are performed fully, purity of mind can be gained and it is by that the attainment of *jñāna* and the destruction of the bondage of the world.

When *karmās* are performed according to the *Vedhic* injunctions it is possible not only to squeeze the body by the physical acts but also possible to squeeze and throw out the dirt of the mind. After that *karmā* is to be stopped, *dhyāna* is to be undertaken which is the activity of the mind and then the state of *jñāna* is attained when even that (mental activity) will stop.

It is only after attaining '*karma nishtā*' effort should be made to attain *jnāna nishtā*. Without the first he cannot go to the second. Once the qualification for going to the second is gained we should not have any connection with the first. A cloth has to be cleaned by dipping it in water and squeezing it but even after the dirt is removed if the cloth is continued to be kept in water and squeezed, the weaving of the cloth will fall apart and the cloth will be torn. Going to *jnāna mārgā* is like drying the moist cloth in wind. The wind and sunlight will remove only the moisture in the cloth. *Jnāna* will destroy the 'cloth' itself! This is not like the cloth being torn and meeting its end. It will remove the 'cloth of *jīvā*' and change it into indestructible gold sheet - the Brahman. Instead of the *jīvā* remaining firm in the *ātmā* the *jīvā* itself will go and only the thing that came as the experience in *nishtai* will remain. It is the state of peace and the highest refuge called '*parāyanam*'.

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SERIAL NAMES IN VISHNU SAHASRANĀMAM

The names '*nishtā sānthi parāyanam*' appear in *Vishṇu Sahasranāmam*. In *Vishṇu Sahasranāmam* some names appear in a serial manner linking one particular matter. Thus seven or eight names connected with *sanyāsam* appear serially, beautiful like flowers joined together.

..... *nirvāṇam beshajam bishak*
Sanyāsakruth samō sānthō nishtā sānthi parāyanam

Thus there are nine names concerning one and the same thing.

Nirvāṇam - that is the end of *jnāna yōga*. It is *Saguṇa Vishṇu* who is like that.

Bēshajam means medicine. It means the medicine that is *jnāna* for the disease of *samsāra*.

It is said that a great devotee of *Natarājā* (He was a well-known composer of Tamil music) when he was bitten by a snake sang a song which says that God is the most effective medicine and the snake poison got neutralized.

It is *Bhagawān* who comes as the antedote to the poison of *karmā*.

He is the medicine. He is also the doctor who administers the medicine. That is what is referred to as 'bhishak'. In *Thiruvānmiyūr* (a suburb of Chennai) the Lord is *Marundiśwarā* (Marundhu in Tamil is medicine). In *Vaithīwarān Kōvil* (near Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu) He is Bhavarōga *Vaithyanātha Swāmi*, the *Jnānāchāryā* who cures the disease of *samsāra*. In his *bāshyam* on *Vishṇu Sahasranāmam Āchāryā* talks of the 'doctor' who gave the medicine of *Gītā*.

What the Lord finally gave as medicine in the *Gītā* is only *sanyāsam* - from *Karmayōgam* to *Sanyāsam* in *Jnānayōgam*. In *Āyurvēdhā* certain medicines are administered after first giving a purgative. Similarly, for clearing all the dirt of *karmā* he has given *karmayōgam* and when giving the medicine of *jnāna* he has laid down *sanyāsam*. Originally, he only established the four *āśramās* and kept *sanyāsam* as the last *āśramam*. The name '*sanyāsakruth*' says that:

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SANYĀSAKRUTH ŚAMŌ

'*Śamō*' : We have seen a lot about *samam*. That is also of the form of the Lord (*Bhagavath Swarūpam*). Mind being subjugated - is that not *samam*? That is the highest state of *jnāna yōga*. From being totally uncontrollable when it goes on subsiding gradually there are several stages. Finally, when the mind subsides in the *āthmā* and ceases to be, it is the place of *siddhi*. That is the goal of a *sanyāsi*. Here *Āchāryā* has given a quotation from a *Smruthi* which

lays down the dharma for each of the four *āśramās*. It says 'dhamam' is the dharma for the *sanyāsi*; for the *vānaprastha* it is 'thapas' with the discipline of 'niyamam'; for the *gruhastha* it is giving 'charity'; the dharma of a *brahmachāri* is to render service to the guru. Then the name '*santha*' comes. A *santhan* is one with *samam*.

After that the name '*nishtā*' comes. One becomes a *sanyāsi*, becomes a '*santhan*' with the mind subjugated and he remains steady in the experience of *jnāna* (remaining in *nishtai*). That state is also *Bhagawān* only. The *Bhagawān* of *Saguṇam* is like this in *Nirguṇam*.

The peace that prevails in that state is indicated by the name '*sānthi*' and to indicate that it is the supreme goal the name '*parāyaṇā*' is used.

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ŚRAVAṆĀ ETC AS THE INJUNCTION OF THE VĒDHĀS

Mahā Vākya Upadēśam comes with *sanyāsam*. Receiving that *Upadēśam* is *śravaṇam*. 'Mananam' which is memorizing the *Upadēśam*, analyzing it and feeling confirmed about it and then *dhyāna* which is '*nidhidhyāsana*' done for making it the actual experience complete the *Sāadhanā*.

The three namely, *Śravaṇam*, *Mananam* and *Nidhidhyāsana* have come as the injunction of the *Vēdhās*. The same Upanishads (*Bṛuhadhāranyakōpanishad II. 4-5*) which gives *samam*, *dhamam*, *uparathi* and *thithikshai* has given the command about these three. *Śamanam*, *dhamanam* etc are not given as direct command but by saying that a *jnāni* will be having the '*āthma sampath*' - will be a *santhan*, *dhānthan*, *uparathan* etc. It lays down these as indirect command but these three (*śravaṇam*, *mananam*

and *nidhidhyāsanam*) have been given as an injunction : ‘*Śrōthavyō, mandhavyō, nidhidhyāsidhavyō*’ - *śravaṇam* has to be done only of ‘*āthma thathva*’ *mananam* and *nidhidhyāsanam* should be practiced. This has been given as the rule.

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ŚRAVANAM AND ŚUŚRUSHA (SERVICE TO GURU)

Śravaṇam here does not mean merely hearing. The word is used in a formal way to indicate that guru’s *Upadēsam* should be seized by the *hrudhayam* itself. When we say ‘eating’ we refer to the act done with the mouth. But its object is to get into the stomach, get digested and become blood. The purport is that the *amrutha* of *Upadēsam* getting digested in mind and *buddhi* and then getting into *hrudhayam*.

The all pervading ‘*ākāśa thathva*’ is exclusive to *śabdhām*. That is why the importance to *śravaṇa* in which *Upadēsam* is received in the form of *śabdhās*. *Vēdhā manthrās* have come out of *Īśwarā*’s breath in the form of sound vibrations and *rishis* have heard them by their supernatural hearing power and given us in a manner that it can be heard by our ears. It has been laid down that what they had heard with their inner ears should be heard by us with our ears but are not to be written and read. When it is written and read from a book since the book is inert (*jadam*) it will show only the alphabets but will not infuse the meaning which is its life. It is only when the *Upadēsam* comes from a living medium namely an *āchāryā* who has known the import of the *Upadēsam* by his own experience the *Upadēsam* will enter with life.

When it is *Upadēsam* from a guru the one who receives it develops the attitude of a *śishyā*. The humility of ‘*śishya bhāva*’ is very necessary for the annihilation of *ahankāram*. Because the difficult *Sāadhanā* of *jñāna mārgā* is being practiced there is a guru for help and rendering service to him (*śuśrushta*) has been

prescribed. The word '*śuśrūṣa*' is connected with *Śravaṇam*. Both are derived from the root '*śru*' which means 'to hear'. The direct meaning of '*śuśrūṣa*' is 'what one likes to hear'. When this is used in the context of the guru, it gets the expanded meaning 'to desire to do as indicated by the guru'. It is not just listening. Whether what is heard is to our liking or not, whatever we hear has to be practiced. Therefore the word '*śuśrūṣa*' acquires the long meaning 'whatever may be the matter heard, to desire to practice it'.

We say that someone does not 'listen to what we say' or we tell him 'you hear what I say'. That only means doing according to what has been heard or told. Therefore *śuśrūṣa* is the desire to act according to what is heard. For this a lot of humility is required. When there is humility one will develop the desire to do service to the person to whom he bows. It is that service which has come to be called '*śuśrūṣa*' in common parlance.

Bhagawān has said :

'Thath viddhi *praṇīpāthēna pariprasnēna sēvayā*' (IV.34) - go the guru, just fall at his feet, listen to him properly, do service to him and receive *jñānōpadēsam* from him.

'Thath viddhi' - get *jñānōpadēsam*.

'*Praṇīpāthēna*' - just falling

'*Pātham*' - falling

'*Nīpātham*' - falling well

'*Prāṇīpātham*' - falling in one go as a surrender.

'*Pariprasnēna*' - listening well, understanding the thing by repeated questions. That is '*śuśrūṣa*'.

After saying this he says '*sēvayā*' - do service.

From the way a matter branches off from one to the other one thing is clear. The formation of the *Gītā ślōkās* here shows that it is only after becoming a *sanyāsi* after giving up all *karmās* one has to go to a guru and receive *jnānōpadēsam* from him. In the earlier *ślōkā* the Lord says '*Jnāna yōga* which is an internal yajna is better than the yajnas of *karmayōga* which are performed with the help of external things. All *karmās* attain fullness in *jnāna*'. Immediately after that he says '*jnānis* who have experienced the 'sathya thathvam' will give you *Upadēsam*. Go to them, fall at their feet, hear them, render service to them and know'. This comes in *Jnāna - Yōgam*. When we see all this it is clear that he has spoken of giving up all *karmās*, going to a *jnāni* and taking *sanyāsam* from him and receiving from him the *Upadēsa* of Brahma Vidhyā.

Suśrusha is doing *śravaṇam* for obediently doing what has been heard. Then the humility that comes up as its inseparable part and then the service that comes from it - thus it develops. The *suśrusha* which is heard with the ears leads to service and that service itself has come to be called *suśrusha*. With the passage of time many people have been understanding *suśrusha* as rendering service and its first meaning namely 'hearing' 'listening' is not known at all.

The guru will consider the *suśrusha* of the *śishyā* namely his listening to his *Upadēsam* with due regard, humility, inner purity and the determination to act according to the *Upadēsam* as greater than any *suśrusha* of the *śishyā* which he renders as bodily service. He will not consider any service he renders for his comfort and convenience as greater than his making proper use of the spiritual wealth that he is giving. So far as he (guru) is concerned the *śishyā* properly hearing is big service and *suśrusha*. More than expecting service from him he will think that he should raise him through his *Upadēsam*. So far as the *śishyā* is concerned he must consider both the kinds of *suśrusha* as important. He should hear the *Upadēsam* whole-heartedly and implement it in action. He should consider

the one who gives *Upadēsam* as *Īśwarā*, surrender to him and render all possible service to him.

If the *manthrā* given as *Upadēsam* does half of what is to be done the grace of the one who gives *Upadēsam* will do the rest. If things are learnt from a book there is no place for all these.

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CAN A GURU WHO HAS HAD ANUBHŪTHI (SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE) BE FOUND?

Śāsthrās speak of a guru as one who has had the (spiritual) experience. Upanishad refers to him as 'Brahma Nishtar' and the *Gītā* calls him '*Thathva dharṣinah*'. One need not have a doubt whether in these days such a guru who has had *sākshāthkāram* can be found. If one has real *mumukshuthā* and has a craving, *Īśwarā* will not fail to show him such a guru. Even if he is not a Brahma Nishtar all the time, *Īśwarā* will show a *sreshtā* among those available and at the time of giving *Upadēsa* of *Mahā Vākya* *Īśwarā* will Himself enter into the guru and do the *Upadēsam* Himself. There need be no doubt about this. Just as the aspirant is craving to find such a guru *Īśwarā* will also be craving for a true *mumukshu*. Therefore he will not let him down. It is not only by getting into a guru but also by entering into the aspirant himself as a '*Sūkshma Guru*' he will shower his grace. But a physical guru not being there and *Īśwarā* Himself coming as the internal guru is very very rare. It is only for the noblest of the *mumukshus* who are rare such a thing happens. Or, even if one is not a *mumukshu* but he has rare previous *samskāras* *Īśwarā* Himself will voluntarily save him. But it is wrong to generalize this.

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TO BE AFTER A SINGLE TARGET

Sanyāsam has been taken and *Upadēsam* has been received from the guru. He should then be constantly thinking of the *āthmā*

only, speaking about and aiming at it. There is the Upanishad saying : 'Give up all talk which does not concern the *āthmā*. In the manner of an arrow in a bow, you be hooked on to *Prañava* (that is in *Mahā Vākya*) and aim at the Brahman as your target and become embedded in it'. Another Upanishad says that other than the *Mahā Vākya* which proclaims the identity of the *Jīvā*-Brahman nothing else is to be thought of. All other talk is only strain to the throat. Krishna *Paramāthmā* says : Thadh buddhaya, Thadh *āthmana*, than *nishtā*, thath *parāyanā* (V.17).

The buddhi and life should be fixed in *āthmā* and consider that as the refuge. This is what the Lord has said in *Sanyāsa Yōgam*. In *Vibhūthi Yōgam* he says :

*Machchiththā madgathaprāñā bōdhayanthah parasparam
Kathayanthascha mām nithyam thushyanthi cha ramanthi cha*
(X-9)

'The thoughts of my pure devotees dwell in me, there lives are fully devoted to my service and they derive great satisfaction from always enlightening one another and conversing about me'.

Vidhyāranya Swāmigaḷ also, when speaking of *Nirguṇa Upāsana* (which is what the *sanyāsi* is to do) says 'Brahman is the only thought, talking to each other only about that and enlightening each other' : thath chinthanam' 'thath kadhanam' 'anyōnyam' 'thath prabhōdhanam'. The *sanyāsi* should be single minded about his aim.

When several *sanyāsīs* are together as a sangam there will be 'Bōdhayānthā Parasparam' (enlightening each other). But even more than one *sanyāsi* being together has not been commended. If several people are together there is room for affection, enmity, competition, jealousy, difference of opinion etc. Therefore once a person becomes a *sanyāsi* he must go to a secluded place and be by himself. It is only to ensure that a *sanyāsi* should not develop attachments, the rule for him is that he should not stay at one place

for more than three days. As a Parivrājaka he should keep moving from place to place*.

(* This rule is not applicable to *sanyāsis* who are in a Mutt which is a 'dharma pīṭam' and who, as gurus, have to guide people on the right path).

On the whole what a *sanyāsi* should do after he has received *Upadēsam* is that he should only be aiming at achieving the Adhvaitha experience about which he has received *Upadēsam*. For achieving this mananam and *nidhidhyāsana* are prescribed.

The detailed exposition of *Sāadhanā* consisting of *Śravaṇā*, manana, *nidhidhyāsana* concludes here.

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THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ŚRAVAṆA, MANANA AND NIDHIDHYĀSANA

To mentally analyse the *Upadēsam* repeatedly and become clear about it is mananam. Once having become clear about the 'āthma thathva', the chiththa (mind) is to be fixed in it without any oscillation. This is *nidhidhyāsana*.

Āchāryā has written a work 'Āthmānāthma Vivēkam' in prose in the form of questions and answers. In that he has given briefly but clearly what is *śravaṇa*, manana and *nidhidhyāsana*. The guru will give the *Upadēsam* that the *Vēdhās* have spoken of Adhvaitha as the truth on the basis of the six-part explanation used to establish a statement. Receiving that *Upadēsam* is *śravaṇam*. To closely examine the non-dual thing that has been heard with the aid of reason consistent with *Vēdha sāsthrās* is mananam. The statement 'reason which is consistent with *Vēdha sāsthrā*' is to be noted carefully. *Sādhana Chathushtayam* and more particularly *śraddhā* which is part of it and bhakthi must have refined his buddhi and reason in this manner. Without wrongly equating the little intelligence with rational intellect, mananam of the guru's

Upadeśam should be done. In *Sōpāna Panchakam* Āchāryā has said : ‘*Dusdhargāth suviramyathām sruthi mathas tharkōnu-sandhīyathām*’ - ‘give up craftiness; analyse it with reason that is consistent with the spirit of *Sruthi*’. That is *mananam*. Having become clear by reasoning, to concentrate the mind only on experiencing what has been understood with intellect without any other thought is *nidhidhyāsanam*.

I have said that a subject is to be established by six ways. These six are : If one reads what is said at the beginning of a book and at the end the subject matter of the book will become clear. This is called ‘*upakrama upasamhāra*’. This is the first of the six. If something has been repeatedly dealt with in a book it will be clear that this is the subject. This is second and is called ‘*abhyāsam*’. The third : if an idea is emphasized in a new way, that is the subject. This is ‘*apūrva*’. Fourth: if something is mentioned and the benefits of accruing from it are listed then that is the subject. This is called ‘*bālam*’. Fifth : If a particular thing is glorified in a big way, then that is the subject. This is ‘*arthārtham*’. The last is ‘*upapaththathi*’ - pointing out the appropriateness with reason and establishing that ‘this is the subject’.

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THE STATE BEFORE SIDDHI

When doing *manana* of *āthmā* many things will become clear and it will lead to *nidhidhyāsanam* in which only the *āthmā* is meditated upon.

When *mananam* and *nidhidhyāsanam* are deep, several things will or may happen which will be known only to *Īswarā* and the *Sādhakā*. Certain things may happen which the *jīvā* also cannot understand. It is to ensure that at this stage he should not remain confused, Āchāryā has injected in him *sraddhā* and *bhakthi* in the beginning only. Therefore he will keep himself to the path shown

by the guru without getting confused. *Īswarā* also will do all that is necessary before reaching him to the goal, like erasing whatever *karmā* and impression which still remain.

Īswarā may not do things in the same way for everyone. Since the carry over from the previous birth is not the same for everyone *Īswarā* may remove them differently for different people. Moreover he takes pleasure in playing a variety of sports. Once the *Sādhakā* is reached to the goal, there will be no scope for *Īswarā*'s sport. Therefore we do not know what all strange things He will do for everyone. For some people it may be possible to think of the *āthmā* as '*akhaṇḍam*' and concentrate.

Āchāryā has thought about these things and therefore he has talked about *nidhidhyāsanam* with the advice 'keep meditating deeply thinking only about that' and then talks about Brahma *Sākshāthkāram* which comes at the end and stopped with that.

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MANANAM WHICH TRANSCENDS THE LITTLE INTELLIGENCE: NIDHIDHYĀSANAM WHICH TRANSCENDS EMOTIONS

Sathyam is known through *Sruthi*, yukthi and anubhavam. It is said that *Śruthi* is *śravaṇam*, yukthi is mananam and anubhava is *nidhidhyāsanam*. Since the *sishyā* hears from the guru (with his ears) matters relating to Brahma *Vidhyā* and the *manthrās* of *Sruthi* it appears that referring to *śravaṇam* as *Śruthi* is all right. About yukthi it has to be explained. The yukthi mentioned here is not which we generally arrive at by our so called rational thinking. It is the same with anubhavam. It is not the experience we have at the level of the mind in different ways. When the mind and buddhi which have become purified by *Sāadhanā* and are filled with bhakthi and *śraddhā* go to converge in the place of *ahankāram* (*ahankāra sthānam*) with the object that *ahankāram* should perish and at that

high state they analyse, know and think - that is called yukthi here. Anubhavam is what the mind and buddhi which have been refined, experience in the depth of the mind from the place of *ahankāram*.

To be peaceful (*sānthā*) with equanimity is called 'sāthvikam'. To become unbalanced due to emotions is 'rājasam'. The yukthi of our buddhi now is *rājasam*. Therefore it is wrong. But the buddhi of the one in the third stage has become *sāthvik* by the destruction of *rājasam*. Therefore its yukthi will be different. It will not be the yukthi of the one who is opposed to sathyam and *sāsthrās* and is remaining within the small limits of rational thinking. But it will be consistent with sathyam and *sāsthrā* and based on high *jnāna* which is above rational thinking. About such buddhi *Āchāryā* says :

*Mokshaika sakthyā vishayēshu rāgam
Nirmūlya sanyasya cha sarvakarma
Sachchraddhayā yah śravaṇādhinishtō
Rājah svabhāvam sa dhunōthi buddhēh*

The meaning is : one who is keen about release, destroys all the attachments to worldly things, then gives up all *karmā*, becomes a *sanyāsi* and engages himself in *śravaṇam* etc and remains firm in them, totally discards the *rājāsa guṇa* of buddhi.' (this covers *mumukshuthva*, *sanyāsam* then *śravaṇam* - the system of *Sādhana*). In that stage the yukthi will be something unique.

In the same manner anubhavam will not be connected with the indriyas but will be connected internally (*antharāthmā*).

I will put it in the professor's style. That yukthi will be super rational and that anubhavam will be mystic.

The need for manana is : it is only if the *Upadēśam* is constantly repeated the mind will remain fixed in it without giving room for anything else. *Brahma sūthram* calls this mananam by the

name 'āvruthi' (repetition, memorizing). *Vedhā* says again and again it should be repeated again and again - 'asakruth *Upadesath*'. *Āchāryā* gives reply in a humourous way to the question how long to do the mananam. He says 'Can it be asked how long the paddy should be pounded? It has to be pounded till the grains of rice get separated. Similarly till the *āthmā* comes out of 'avidhyā' mananam has to be continued.

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FOR THE TWO DIFFERING ATTITUDES (BHĀVANĀ) TO GO

However much the mind and buddhi have become refined, till *sākshāthkāram* materializes, *māyā* will not leave them. It is not entirely correct to blame *māyā*. *Sākshāthkāram* is the height of anubhavam. Till all *karmā* is fully exhausted it cannot be had. In spite of any amount of *Sāadhanā* if the *karmā* of previous births is several times the *Sāadhanā* what can be done? For that also to get exhausted now unwanted thoughts may harass the *Sādhakā* - not as the mischief of *māyā* but as *Īśwarā*'s prasād, we can say. This does not mean it is *kāma*, *krōdha*. They must have been wiped off much earlier. But there are two other unwanted (undesirable) thoughts. One is called '*asambhāvanā*'. The other is called '*viparītha bhāvanā*'. *Asambhāvanā* is the thought 'we go on doing *Sāadhanā*. How can we become Brahman? How small we are! How big is Brahman! Is it possible that it can happen?' *Viparītha bhāvanā* is the thought which comes when the doubt about achieving the experience of Adhvaitha becomes very strong : 'It is not possible. Only dwaitham is possible, sathyam. *Jivā* is different and Brahma is different'. This is the *bhāvanā* that comes from the feeling 'with all the effort we have made we remain a separate *jivā*' and the thought that we can only be separate in dwaitham.

Of the two it is for the removal of *asambhāvanā*, manana is prescribed. *Nidhidhyāsanam* is to be done for the removal of *viparītha bhāvanā*. Even though *asambhāvanā* will appear like the verdigris that covers a thing if *Vedānta sāsthrās* are analysed with refined buddhi and the powerful *Mahā Vākyās* are repeated continuously, even if actual experience does not materialize immediately, it will become clear that it can materialize. That will be enough.

But unless *sākshāthkāram* actually materializes how will the *viparītha bhāvanā* go? Only if there is intense *nidhidhyāsanam* the actual experience will come. There is no other go. To know the sweet materials with which an eatable is made and therefore to conclude that the eatable must be sweet is one thing. But there is some lingering doubt. 'Even if sweet materials go to make the thing will it somehow be bitter?' At such a time unless one actually tastes it how can he be clear in his mind? With full dedication that what has been concluded by the mind that the true thing (*sath vasthu*) must become experienced if *nidhidhyāsanam* is done it will show its taste now and then. Showing the taste here means that the taste, one who tastes and the one who gives the taste would all have become one. Even if that stage goes away afterwards, the conviction that there is 'definitely experience of *Adhvaitham*' will come. Then '*Viparītha bhāvanā*' cannot remain.

It can also be said that the appearance of such differing *bhāvanās* is also what *Īśwarā* has caused to help him. It is because of that he gets encouragement to go full steam in *nidhidhyāsanam*. Otherwise he may become easy going and miss the goal. Even if he does not miss it, it will result in the goal getting delayed very much. It is only when there are conflicting thoughts one will seriously try to prove that one of them is right. In the same way the *asambhāvanā* and *viparītha bhāvanā* help as incentives.

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THE GREATNESS OF MANANAM - NIDHIDHYĀSANAM

Mananam which analyses a thing will now and then lead to *nidhidhyāsanam* in which that thing is experienced. Then it is only *Dhyānam* on that. *Āchāryā* has a favourite sentence to describe it : 'Samāna prathyaya pravāhakaraṇam'. It means that *Dhyānam* is concentration on one thing just as the flood flows in one direction. It is like the way oil flows from a container. It flows straight like a wire - 'thailadhāravath'.

We refer to great *jnānis* and those who have great (spiritual) powers as 'Muni'. One who is meritorious in doing mananam came to be called 'Muni'. *Āchāryā* has said in *Sūthra Bāshyam* that the word has been derived in this manner : 'Mananān munirithi (cha)vyuthpaththi sambhavāth'. He says that the word Muni has the import of being great in *jnāna*. '*Jnāna athisaya arthathvāth*'. Therefore mananam does not mean to indulge in logic with buddhi and understanding the spiritual truths (*adhyāthma sathyam*). It will be achieving clarity with intuition which is far above it.

Our *Āchāryā* has given a worshipful place to *sravaṇam* of *Upadēsam*. But he himself says that mananam is hundred times greater than *sravaṇam* : '*Śruthēh sathaguṇam vidhyān*'. We can then understand at what level it stands.

He does not stop there. Having said that mananam is hundred times greater than *sravaṇam* he proceeds to say that *nidhidhyāsanam* is one lakh times greater : '*mananāthapi nidhidhyāsam laksha guṇam*'. (V.C.364)

We may have bags and bags of sugar. We know in detail that it is of high quality. But will all that equal our tasting one pinch of it? That is why *Āchāryā* says that *nidhidhyāsanam* is one lakh times greater than mananam.

In *nidhidhyāsanam* also he does not remain steady in permanent *Brahmānubhavam*. He does *nidhidhyāsanam* by Self-

effort. When it is said he does it he gets flashes of *Brahmānubhavam* etc there is *dwaitam*. That Brahman, instead of being a flash like lightning, should 'electrocute' him, kill the individual *jīvā* and make him Brahman which is *amruth* and that is the end; that is the place of *siddhi*.

Is not *nidhidhyāsanam* also an activity like what our hands and legs do? However great it may be so long as there is action and the one who does it (*karthā*) how can it be by itself as the only truth (*eka sathyam*)?

Still, so long as one exists as a *jīvā*, in order that he should not be like that the highest act he can do is only to think of the Brahman. Therefore he has to hold on to that function of *nidhidhyāsanam* and do it without break.

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WORM BECOMING A WASP; TO MAKE A WORM A WASP

From the activity of thinking only of Brahman it will be Brahman itself and the actionless state. There is one thing called 'Bramara - *kīda nyāyam*'. The worm in the nest will be constantly thinking that it should become a wasp. By that constant thought it will change its form, get wings and fly out of the nest. *Kīda* is a worm. *Bramaram* is wasp. The worm doing *nidhidhyāsanam* and becoming a wasp is 'Bramara *kīda nyāyam*'. *Āchāryā* has said that in this manner if the *jīvā* is in constant thought of Brahman that he should become that and keeps thinking that even now he is Brahman and does *nidhidhyāsanam* he becomes that.

He says like this to prevent the one following *jnāna mārgā* turning to *Saguṇa* Brahman. He has said that, by his thinking all the time of the Brahman, he will automatically become that. In reality that materializes only by the grace of *Īśvarā*. It is as His

prasād that the *jivāthmā* becomes *Paramāthmā*. It is not that *Āchāryā* does not know this; the *Brahmasthrām* which he had used against the *Mīmamsakās* is 'no *karmā* will give fruit by itself. It is *Īśwarā* who gives the fruits'. When that is so he would not have thought that the activity of *nidhidhyāsana* (constant thinking) will automatically give the great fruit of *Brahma Nirvāṇam*.

Māyā's action of hiding is called '*thirōdhanam*'. Now the *Brahmam* which is the real 'we' has become hidden. It has become '*thirōhitha*'. After saying in the *Brahma Sūthram* that the thing that is hidden will show itself by meditation on *Paramāthmā*, thinking that people will understand this to mean it is something automatic and makes it clear 'it is *Īśwarā* who had hidden it and created the bondage. If we do *nidhidhyāsanam* it is he who will remove the screen, reveal the sathyam and give *mōksham*. When *Āchāryā* wrote the *bāshyam* for this he has said more explicitly 'this manifestation will not take place naturally and automatically for anybody. It is only for one who makes efforts and does *nidhidhyāsanam* it happens as *Īśwarā*'s *prasād* : 'Na *swabhāvatha ēva sarvēśhām janthūnām*' - revelation will not take place naturally to everyone. *Īśwara prasādāth samsiddhasya kasyachith ēva āvir bhavathih*. It is only to a rare person who has attained the highest *siddhi* by the grace of *Īśwarā* that revelation comes.

In *Adhvaitha śāsthrās* *Īśwarā*'s grace is by and large taken as guru's grace. But someone asked why *Āchāryā* has said in *Vivēka Chūdamāni* that *Īśwarā*'s grace is higher than that of the guru. *Āchāryā*'s answer is : 'Gurus will remain on the shore and guide the *sishyā* about how to swim and cross the ocean of *samsāra*. Only the *sishyā* by his own effort gets the true wisdom (*prajna*), uses it as boat and swims across the ocean and it is *Īśwarā* who blesses him with that *prajna*.

Āchāryā has said that the gurus do not cross the ocean and it is the *sishyās* who cross it by the grace of *Īśwarā* probably because

he thought that in times to come there may not be many *jnāna* gurus who would have attained (Adhvaitha) siddhi but so far as *śishyās* are concerned *Īśwarā* will remain within such people and give redemption.

Another reason could be : If a *śishyā* has the attitude of real surrender and he entrusts himself wholly to the guru, his grace itself will act as the boat, the favourable wind etc and reach him to the shore. But such total surrender may not be possible for everyone. But if he does not do surrender like that and thinks 'in any case he is guru. Has he not given the *Upadēsam*? Will his grace fail to reach me to the goal of the *Upadēsam*?' and remains a little slack in *Sādhana* what will happen? It is because *Āchāryā* did not want such a situation to happen he must have said 'Guru will guide only from the shore. It is you who will have to take the boat across'.

Although *Āchāryā* has said 'you yourself have to do it' he must have thought of the possibility of the ego developing - 'Oh! After all there is so much power for our effort'. Therefore he has said 'although you are doing, it is *Īśwarā*'s grace that helps to prod you and remains with you as the companion.'

When we see what *Bhagawān* has said in *Gītā* you will find that *Āchāryā* has said the same thing. While concluding the *Gitōpadēsam* *Bhagawān* says 'you surrender unto me. I will take care'. (XVIII-66). Before that he says 'make total surrender to *Īśwarā*. By his grace you will attain transcendental peace and the supreme and eternal abode'. (XVIII-62). In another place he has said '*Uddharēdh āthmanāthmanam*' (VI-5) - 'one has to raise himself', thus praising self-effort. The import is 'unless total surrender is made one has to succeed by one's own effort. Within these also there is *Īśwarā*'s grace unseen.

If the one who does deep *nidhidhyāsanam* off and on forgets himself and remains immersed in Brahman and again comes out of

that state, it is only *Īśwarā* who causes them. Even from the time he commences with *nithyānithya vasthu vivēkam* - in fact even earlier when he does *karmā* and bhakthi properly - it is *Īśwarā* who makes him progress inch by inch as the fruit of his efforts. But he does not at all show that he is doing it. It is only by realizing 'we too have achieved some purity of mind, some *vairāgyam*, we are able to control the mind a little' the aspirant can make a guess of *Īśwarā*'s grace. But if he does *nidhidhyāsanam* it is *Īśwarā* who directly causes him to remain immersed in Brahman. Earlier, the *jīvā* had the activity of progressing and getting refined. Now what activity can he perform to go to the actionless state? He can think about it but how can he make becoming itself an activity?

We say 'I have passed the examination'. But in reality is it that we have passed? We only wrote the examination. We did well in that. But can we make ourselves pass? It is the examiner who declares that we have passed. Having written the examination we have to keep waiting. The examiner has to say that we have passed. (I am talking of the olden days when unfair means were not practiced to force the examiner to pass a candidate). This is the position in the phenomenal world of action - we can only write the examination. To pass as a fruit of our writing there is the examiner who is the *phaladhātā*. For us to pass in the actionless world - to pass in the examination of *Sādhanā* - it is the grace of *Īśwarā*, the *Phaladhātā*, which is instrumental.

When we pass in our examination the 'pass' is just a word and has no value by itself. Its value lies in going for higher studies and getting a job. But in *Sādhanā*, in *nidhidhyāsanam* which is its end, 'pass' itself is a great experience. There is nothing above that. It is the state of Brahma *Nirvāṇam*, Adhvaitha *mōksham* and eternal bliss.

The truth (sathyam) is that it is *Īśwarā* who makes the *jīvāthmā* the *Paramāthmā* as the fruit of his thinking of *Paramāthmā* all the time.

In Tamil there is a saying which is more appropriate than 'Bramara *kīda nyāyam*'. 'By repeated stinging of the worm the wasp makes it itself'. The worm does not of its own become a wasp; it will be 'doing thapas' (intensely desiring) to become a wasp. It is the wasp that stings it repeatedly and changes it to its own form. In the same manner, *Īśwarā* does to the *jivāthmā* who is doing *nidhidhyāsanam*.

But in this comparison also there is a difference. It is *Īśwarā*, the *Saguṇa* Brahman, who brings about the change of form. But the change it brings about is that of the formless *Nirguṇa* Brahman! The jiva too meditates to become that only and not to become *Īśwarā*. Therefore this stands high and apart incomparably.

Īśwarā who was extending His grace from the beginning to help him progress without showing Himself even now takes him to *samādhi* now and then without showing himself and finally makes him *Jīvan Mukthā* and *Vidēha Mukthā*. *Īśwarā* who brings to naught the *jīvā*, Himself becomes naught and makes the Brahman which is sathyam, *jñānam*, anantham to shine brightly. Shining means what? Will it be something like a thousand watts bulb burning? We say such things just to understand it at our level.

It is the state which cannot be described by word, cannot be comprehended by the mind, no greater bliss than that, no greater peace, no greater freedom - the state of being the only thing (*ēka vasthu*) spread all over without limit (*akhaṇḍam*) and the Truth of all truths and eternal. That is the path which *Āchāryā* has laid down as *jñāna mārgā*, Adhvaitha *Sādhana* which will reach us to the final place.

By his grace we have been fortunate enough to speak about it, listen to it and think about it. Let us pray to him to go forward gradually in that path.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE IMMEDIATELY

What needs to be done first is *karmānushtanam* - doing it in accordance with the *sāsthrā* rules. These days there is a view that if it is Adhvaitha all *karmānushtānās* and *āchārās* should be given up! Taking Adhvaitha as a licence to be without *āchāram*, it is being said 'What is there in all these? All this *Upadēsam* is meant for old fashioned people who will not change with modern times'. Without any experience of Adhvaitha - the experience of non-difference between *jīvā* and Brahman and even without making any effort for it, there is a lot of tall talk : 'How does *ātmā* have *karmā*? Where is the restriction of *āchāram*? If we observe *Varnāśrama* differences is it not contrary to Adhvaitha?' Thus Adhvaitha is being dragged for them to give up *sāsthrās* and be as they want. I did not want to become a victim of this sin and therefore I have been refraining from making *upanyāsam* on Adhvaitha. Somehow today I have been made to talk. After having spoken so much I need not conclude it with a feeling of guilt. Since it is *Āchāryā*'s view that everyone must know an outline of Adhvaitha I shall try to remain satisfied that due to his blessings I have spoken about it to the extent I know.

No one need consider this (Adhvaitha *Sāadhanā*) to be taken up seriously. Make it firm in your mind that *jīvā* and Brahman are one. That will start working on its own. What you have to do consciously is to observe the *karmā* according to *sāsthrās*.

In the Adhvaitha *sāsthrā* which has come in the *sampradhāya* (tradition) of great men who had the experience (of Adhvaitha) Vaidhika *karmānushtānam* is laid down as the first and going to Adhvaitha *Sāadhanā* only after achieving siddhi in that. Basic to everything is that we should try to be good people. Our becoming '*ekam sath*' can wait. We should not think that we are starting a big *Sāadhanā* and give up these. Krishna Himself has said '*Sath*' means

not only 'Brahmam which is the reality' but also what is good (good quality).

Sadhbhāvē sādhubhāvē cha sadhithyēthath prayujyathē

(XVII-26).

We call a good person a 'sādhū'. That word is derived from 'sath'. We say that someone is a 'sath' and another is 'asath'. Here we call what is good as 'sath'. Therefore let us first get hold of this 'sath' and through that go to the other 'sath'.

Good *guṇas* (*sadhguṇa*) and Brahma *jnānam* are not unrelated. *Āchāryā* has said that this is '*sahakāri karaṇam*' - to be together and give the fruit. In *Gītā* when the Lord says what *jnāna* is, He says 'Should not be boasting, should not be ostentatious, should have the feeling of ahimsa, be patient and straightforward' (XIII-7). Beginning like this he gives a long list. It is here that *Āchāryā* in his *bāshyam* raises the objection what others make. How can all these be called *jnāna*?' and answers 'Since all these are aids for attaining *jnāna* all these are also called *jnāna*'. He has also said that such good qualities will be the efficient cause for *jnāna* to dawn.

When it is said that there should be no boasting it means there should be humility. Let us begin with humility and try to be good. Let us keep that 'sath' in mind, pray to *Āchāryā* and do these good things.

It is usual to conclude saying 'sath'* I will say this in my mind on behalf of all of you.

(* *Periyavā* refers to 'Om thath sath').

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SAUNDARYALAHARĪ





THE ĀCHĀRYĀ - A DIVINE INCARNATION

Adhi *Śankara Bhagvadpādhā* whom we adore as the 'Āchāryā' [the preceptor appearing in the middle of the Adhvaitha āchārya parampara or lineage beginning with *Sadāsivā*, i.e. Sri *Dakṣiṇāmūrthi*] was an incarnation of Lord *Paramēśvarā*. He was *Dakṣiṇāmūrthi* descended to earth, the god who remains in profound silence and in deep quiescence with all his power of *jnāna* drawn inward. If *Dakṣiṇāmūrthi* is the ultimate in quietude, his incarnation *Śankarā* was ever active, engaged in writing commentaries, composing hymns, holding disputations with the learned and so on. If the one remained rooted to his place under the pipal tree without any action, the other was always on the move, journeying on foot, covering almost the entire *Bhārata* from *Rāmēśvaram* to *Kailāsā*.

The quiescent Brahman is *Śiva*, while the Brahman that has functions to perform, i.e. the Brahman that is active, is *Śakthi*. It is through the *jnāna* manifested as energy that the phenomenal world functions. If the *Āchāryā* accomplished so much in his brief life, it means that *Ambāl* who had been latent in him as the energy of *jnāna* in his original form of *Dakṣiṇāmūrthi* now found open expression through him. It follows that he was an incarnation of *Īśvarā* and *Ambāl* combined. We speak of mother, father and preceptor together (*māthā, pithā, guru*). Well, the World Mother and the World father fused into one and became incarnate as the World Teacher, that is as Jagadguru *Śankarāchāryā*.

Dakṣiṇāmūrthi who is quiescent inheres in himself *Ambāl*, the active principle. Similarly, though the *Āchāryā* was unceasingly involved in a variety of work, he was within himself all stillness and serenity. 'What exists absolutely by Itself, as Itself,

without any function to perform is the Brahman. Indeed this state of the Brahman is also the true Nature of the individual self (*jīvātman*)'. It was *Śaṅkarā* who established this monistic truth on an unshakeable foundation. He himself ever remained in this state experiencing the Brahman in himself.

Since he was born a mortal, he did much in the manner of a mortal, all the while remaining in his true state of the Brahman. In a dramatic performance a person has to enact the role assigned to him or her and never reveal his or her true self. A millionaire acting as *Kuchēlā* (*Sudāmā*) has to appear in rags. However movingly he fills his role, he knows that in reality he is not a poor man. Divine incarnations are to be understood in the same way: they are actors in this cosmic drama of ours. Inwardly they are never forgetful of their real selves but outwardly they 'act' as if they have forgotten them, conducting themselves as they do like humans. It is for this reason that we describe divine incarnations like *Krishṇa Paramātmā* as '*Māyā-mānushas*', '*Līlā-mānushavīgrahās*' and '*Kapata-nāṭaka-vēshas*'. Rama was an *avatārā* of *Mahā Viṣṇu*, but when *Rāvāṇā* abducted Sita he gave way to grief like an ordinary mortal. He wept inconsolably when Lakshmana fainted on the battlefield in Lanka.

Why should divine incarnations act in this manner? The very purpose of their descent to earth is to set an example to mankind through their life and to show it the right path. Human beings have to advance step by step to reach the goal of fullness and they have to do so mindful of their limitations and without going violently against Nature. It is to show them - that is men trapped in their natural urges - and encourage them in their efforts and to instill in them confidence that the divine incarnations live and act like mortals.

In this manner the *Āchāryā* also adopted the disguise of a mortal. He descended to earth to make mankind aware of the state of *jñāna* in which the entire universe will become nought and in

which the mind will vanish without any trace of its existence. He took birth on this earth only to impart to humanity knowledge of the Adhvaithic Brahman, the One without a second. In order to be in accord with human Nature, he accepted the world and the mind as if they were real but, at the same time, cut out the path for people to be taken step by step to the state in which these (the world and the mind) would cease to be.

There is a power that conducts everything. Since there exists nothing other than the Brahman it follows that the Great Power that carries out all functions inheres in It. If those who cannot meditate upon the *Nirguṇa Brahman* turn their minds with devotion to this Great Power they will eventually be able to obtain the *jnāna* of the true functionless and quiescent Brahman. Since the Brahman that conducts the affairs of the world itself blesses them with this *jnāna*, our *Āchāryā* showed people the path of bhakti or devotion as a prelude to the path of *jnāna*. That is how he established the systems of worship of deities, collectively known as *Shāṇmatha*, and composed a number of devotional hymns. He also went on pilgrimage to sacred places in every nook and corner of the land, installed yantras in some temples and laid down rules to be followed in a number of shrines for the conduct of puja and other rituals.

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THE SAUNDARYALAHARĪ- THE CREST OF DEVOTIONAL POETRY

Śaṅkarā wrote numerous devotional works and the *Saundaryalaharī* remains the crest of all of them. What do ordinary people know about the *Āchāryā*? Do you know that he wrote a commentary on the *Brahmasūthrā*, that he established Adhvaitha as the ultimate truth, that he is the last word on the subject? But one thing is certain; the very mention of his name brings to their

mind a number of devotional poems authored by him, particularly two of them, the *Bhaja Govindam* and the *Saundaryalaharī*.

The *Saundaryalaharī*, also represents the *sikhara* (crest) of his poetic genius. The metre in which it is composed is appropriately called '*Śikharinī*' and it has 17 syllables per foot. Another metre with the same number of syllables is *Mandākrāntā* in which *Kālidāsa* has composed his *Mēhadūtam*, a work full of poetic *rasa*. In this metre each foot is divided into sets of four, six and seven syllables, while in *Śikharinī* the division is into six and 11 syllables.

People learned in the arts of music and dance believe that better than *tālās* with an even number of beats are those that are '*miśra*', (mixed) i.e. combining an even number of beats with an odd number of them. The latter give greater aesthetic pleasure combining as they do two tempi- they impart verve to the music when it is needed through the fast tempo and the tranquillness needed for the same through the slow tempo. In the same way in poetry too there is greater beauty when the metre is divided into sets of syllables that are even and odd in number.

While the *Saundaryalaharī* is remarkable both for its poetic form and aesthetic beauty, its special distinction is that it is also a great devotional hymn.

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THE JNĀNI AND DEVOTION

People nowadays view philosophy in isolation from other subjects. That is why they ask questions like this: 'Is it possible for an exponent of Adhvaitha like the *Āchāryā* to have supported the way of devotion? It's all bunkum. Hymns composed by someone else must have been ascribed to him. The *Āchāryā* could not have also installed anything like *yanthras* anywhere.' We must remember that our *Āchāryā* was not like a professor; he did not

teach philosophy, as an independent subject. His mission was to raise people up including those not capable of grasping philosophy lift them up little according to their different levels of maturity and understanding. To those who were capable of taking the path of *jnāna* be imparted instruction in a thorough manner through his commentaries and *prakarṇa* (original) works. But others he taught devotion exhorting them to follow a life of *karmā* or action or action in accordance with their *svadharma*. In pursuance of this he visited various sacred places, installed idols and yantras there and composed hymns to the deities.

We often hear people arguing thus; 'The man who believes that all is one is a *jnāni*. Devotion implies that God and his devotee are two different entities. So a *jnāni* can never be a devotee.' People who speak thus cannot claim that they have realized monistic *jnāna*! Think of *Śukabrahma* who was a true Adhvaithic *jnāni*. What was he like? Or take the examples of *Madhusūdana Sarasvathi* and *Sadāśivā Brahmēndrā*. They were *jnānis* but at the same time they were supreme devotees; in fact they have even authored devotional hymns. *Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa*, for example, accepted advaita but all the while he kept chanting, 'Kālī! Kālī!'. In recent years we have had the example of *Ramaṇa Maharshi*, a great Adhvaithi, who sang the praises of *Aruṇāchalēśvara*.

There were also saint-poets like *Manikkavāchakar*, *Nammāzhvār*, *Aruṇagirināthar*, and *Thāyumānavar* whose hearts melted in devotion; but in their devout outpourings there appear flashes of the Adhvaithic bliss they experienced.

If it is argued that a *jnāni* would not or should not compose a devotional work, I would say he should not compose a work on *jnāna* either. If the logic of the former view is accepted I would say that all those who have written works on *jnāna* or taught *jnāna* are not *jnānis*. Why do I say so? How do you identify a *jnāni*? All this world is nothing but *Māyā*. Because of their nescience it is that

people regard themselves as individual *jīvātmās* [that is each thinks that he is a separate entity]' It is out of a realization of this truth that a *jñāni* tries to free himself from the world and the mind that gives rise to such nescience so as to remain rooted in his Self and to identify it with all in the awareness that there is no second. If such a *jñāni* were to be a teacher, write books and give discourses—even if the books and discourses relate to *jñāna* – can his action be justified? There is a real world outside of him, and apart from him there exist many *jīvātmās* as separate entities: does he have to think thus if he were to lift up the world that is apart from him by imparting *jñāna* to people through his writings and discourses? It would mean that all preceptors of *jñāna* were not truly *jñānis*. But can we take such a view? Would it not be blasphemous to do so? What would then be the power of the teaching imparted by men lacking in *jñāna*? What would be the power of one who has no inward experience of the Truth?

What is our own experience in this respect? Take the chapters on *jñāna* in the *Bhagvadgīta*, for example, or our *Āchāryā's* *Vivekachūdāmaṇī*, the *Avadhūtagīta* of *Dattātrēya*, the *Yoga-Vāsishta* of *Vāsishta*, or, say, a hymn by *Thāyumānavar*. When we read any of them we are transported across *Māyā* to an indefinable realm in the ocean of tranquility.

There are examples of individuals who, after reading such works, have had the urge to leave hearth and home for the forest or for a cave in a mountain to remain there in solitude, delighting themselves in the *Ātman*. If the authors of the works in question had not composed them without having experienced the Supreme Reality how could their teaching have the power to move people?

For argument's sake it could be asked how it is possible for a *jñāni* to become a devout person or for him to become a teacher to impart instruction in *jñāna*. Even if this may appear not possible we must remember that the sport of *Īśvarā* is such that there are no

limits in it for what is possible and what is not possible - in it such things (like a *jnāni* becoming a devout person and a teacher) do happen.

If you ask how a *jnāni* who remains an Adhvaithi inwardly seems to function as a Dvaiti (dualist) outwardly, we can reply only by saying that it is all part of the divine sport. Even if he has been freed of his mind and of *Māyā* it does not mean that the outward world and with it the cosmos of living creatures have become extinct. What does this show? It is a Great Mind that has created all this, laid down rules to keep the cosmos in a certain order and, at the same time, it is the same Great Mind that helps people under the sway of *Māyā*, letting them act according to their whims. It is this power that the monistic system calls the *Saguṇa Brahman*, *Īśvarā*. In the *Śāktha* and *Śaiva* systems it is called *Śakthi*, *Parāśakthi*, *Ambāl*, while the *Nirguṇa Brahman* is called *Śivam*. Just as the *Nirguṇa Brahman* functions as the *Saguṇa Brahman* in the outward world of *karmā*, the *jnāni* who has achieved perfection in his experience of the *Nirguṇa Brahman* is kept engaged in the outward by the *Saguṇa Brahman*.

To endeavour to dispel *Māyā* and to obliterate the mind through meditation and inward inquiry is the path of *jnāna*. Another path is that of dedicating the same mind in a devout manner to *Parāśakthi* who has created this very mind and *Māyā*. It is like handing the keys to the thief! *Parāśakthi* is the cause of *Māyā* and she keeps our minds relentlessly under her sway. But it is all part of her sport and in reality she is supremely compassionate. It is when two entities are joined together again after having been separated from each that they realise the rare quality of togetherness, what a great experience togetherness is. When an individual prays for being united with the Supreme there is a twofold aesthetic experience of a divine Nature; There is, apart from the *rasa* of devotion arising from the very act of prayer, the *rasa* of the grace of *Parāśakthi* who, in response to the prayer and

out of her supreme love, brings about such a union. It is for this reason that *Parāśakthi* engages herself in dualistic play. So when a man is devoted to her, and prays to her for release from worldly existence (*Māyā*), she blesses him with the milk of *jnāna*; indeed he is blessed with the ultimate freedom.

There is an erroneous belief that the goal of bhakti is to become separated from the Lord and to worship him in an attitude of dualism. That is why people ask how a *jnāni* (a non-dualist) can follow the path of devotion. They are not aware of the fact that even in such bhakti as in that which the Lord and the devotee are separate entities the latter will eventually be taken to the state in which he will be able to pray thus; 'Without ever being separated from you, Lord, I must become one with you.' When he reaches such a state the *Kārya Brahman* or the *Saguṇa Brahman* that is *Parāśakthi* will bless him with the *jnāna* that will take him to the monistic entity called the *Karaṇa Brahman* or the *Nirguṇa Brahman*.

For those who are not capable of following the path of *jnāna*, the *jnāni* himself has an answer. He knows that they have to obtain *jnāna* as the grace of *Īśvarā* which they have to earn by being constantly devoted to him. And it is for their benefit [to help them in their bhakti] that he composes devotional poems and installs yantras. Besides he codifies methods of puja, himself performs puja, encourages the construction of temples, and the digging of ponds [for the benefit of the public]

All cannot adopt with ease the path of *jnāna* which involves realizing the truth of the *Mahāvākyas* that proclaim the non-difference between the Brahman and the individual Self. This realization comes as a result of listening to expositions of the Adhvaithic discipline, *dhyāna* (meditation) and *nididhyāsana* (fervent one-pointed meditation). To become aware that the Ātman is the Brahman, the mind must be obliterated; but how it is

to be done one does not know. The mind is stubborn and refuses to be destroyed. It seems that the effort to annihilate the mind has to be taken by the mind itself. How can it put an end to itself by itself? You can beat someone with the palm of your hand. But how can the palm beat itself? Even though we are perplexed, not able to understand anything, don't we realize that there must be a Great Power that has created all these minds? So, instead of undertaking the Herculean task of eradicating our minds ourselves, it would be better for us to depend on *Parāśakthi* herself to do the same for us. For this purpose we must fall at her feet and pray to her to bless us with *jnāna*. Is it not better to fall at the feet of the man who has issued the summons than to fall at the feet of the witness?

Either *Parāśakthi* will do away with our mind and bestow on us her own profoundly serene state of *Śiva* the state in which each knows himself to be *Śiva* ('*Śivō'ham*'). Or she will tell us: 'Is not all this my sport? It is because of *Māyā* that the sport has ended in an injury. I will suppress this *Māyā*, wipe it away. Then like me, you will inwardly remain in the state of *Śāntam*, *Śivam*, *Adhvaitham* and , outwardly, with a pure mind untouched by *Māyā*, you will delight yourself in all that I do, in all my dance, in all the drama I enact, and you can yourself keep dancing in ecstasy. Remain ever in bliss, seeing yourself in me, and seeing me in all this cosmic drama. And even though the mind is not eradicated it will have a fullness of its own''.

If you keep lamenting and feel a sense of shame that, try as you might, you have not succeeded in freeing yourself from the clutches of *Māyā* and that your mind has not been blotted out, *Parāśakthi* will tell you: "Why do you weep, child? Why are you overcome by shame? Is it because the world has not ceased to exist for you? It is only if you have created the world that you can destroy it. Did you create the sun and the moon, the mountains, the trees and creepers, the oceans, the insects, the birds and the beasts, the hundreds of thousand of creatures, the human species?

If you did not create all these why do you keep sorrowing over such a tiny thing as 'yourself'? Was this 'you' created by you? Did you create this *Māyā* which blinds you to the fact that all these things that seem to be different entities are in fact my disguises? Child, the world and the mind in which you are trapped and in which you find yourself helpless and the *Māyā* in which is caught what is called 'you' are all my creations. Haven't I spoken through *Krishṇa*, '*Mama Māyā duratyaya*'? I have also used in the same context the word 'daivi' [caused by divine power]. If these (the world, the mind and *Māyā*) are your creation, you will be able to undo them. But if they have been created by me? And I possess divine power to the full. In my sport I alone am omnipotent (possessing sarva *Śakthi*) and beings like you are *kinchith-Śākthās* (those possessing very little power). So why should you grieve over the fact, or feel a sense of shame, that you cannot destroy what was created by me, *Māyā*, the mind and the world? Such a task is beyond you and it can be accomplished only with my compassion. What have been created by me must be destroyed by me. Come to me with devotion. I will destroy them little by little.'

'If a man controls his mind and senses and follows the path of *jñāna* it is because of my grace, because I allow him [or enable him] to do so. Giving up what appear as separate entities and to have the longing to grasp the One and to become that One; they are part of Adhvaithic *vāsanā* and the result of my blessing.'

[So far the Great *Āchāryā* spoke the words of Ambika. Now he continues, in his own words]. One more interesting point. The *jñāni* who has non-dualistic experience and has become one with all, also witnesses the play of *Māyā* and delights himself in it. He can discern things as separate entities and at the same time realise that it is the One that has become the many. Without taking part in the play himself, he finds great delight in it and keeps worshipping *Parāśakthi* who enacts the play. It is *Ambā* who is the cause of his being like herself and of his being by her side dualistically and non-

dualistically at the same time. There is a point to be noted in this context. The *jnāni* here evinces devotion not only for the sake of those who do not follow the path of *jnāna*. He is lost in wonder about how the One without a second plays dualistically in so many different ways. In this sport though there are aspects that can cause harm there is so much that is beneficent- and what about the many different ways in which beauty, love and compassion are manifested? The *jnāni* is not only lost in wonder about all this, he also extols the divine play and delights in it and whole - heartedly pays obeisance to the One who is sporting, that is *Śakthi*. *Śukāchāryā* clearly echoes the same sentiment. If a devotee who is not a *jnāni* adores the Lord in pursuance of his selfish desire for liberation, the *jnāni* who is freed from *Māyā* and is liberated evinces devotion for the sake of devotion and not for any purpose [not with any motive]. *Śukāchāryā* pays a tribute to the *jnāni* in this manner.

[The Great Master again speaks the words of Ambika....] ‘It is I who give the *jnāni* a new kind of devotion in his *jnāna* itself. When the time is ripe I will give you too the *jnāna* that arises from bhakti. Why do you grieve? I will take care of you. I will free you from the bonds that I myself have created. Don’t lament, saying, ‘I want to be freed! I want to be freed! I want to be freed! It is all my work. Be firm in the belief that I am present in everything. If I am everything, if I am all, there is no need for you to be freed from anything.

‘Those who follow the path of *jnāna* and are engaged in metaphysical inquiry can obtain the peace that comes of an awareness of the oneness of all. Let them go their way. If you do not possess the strength to follow their path, child, do not be ashamed of yourself on that account. Take the path of devotion, love. See the world in all its apparent plurality. But do not, at the same time, view the many as separate entities and realise that they are basically the One entity that is I. Love me and view everything

with love and may this love be all-embracing . I too will bestow on you the most exalted blessing that love can bring and thereby raise you to the state of *jnāni*.' Thus even if you follow the path of bhakti, *Ambāl* will bring you fulfillment.

Ambāl here means the *Paramātmā*, God or one's chosen deity.

Such *Parabrahma-Śakthi* as described above will manifest herself as *Māyā*. She will bless the devout in her *Saguṇa* form; and in her *Nirguṇa* form she will liberate the one adhering to *jnāna*; and through bhakti itself she will enable a person to become a *jnāni*.

In sum, if it is asked whether one who has written a work of *jnāna* will compose a devotional hymn, it occurs to me that it is only because one has written a work of *jnāna* that one must necessarily have composed a devotional hymn. Only then, I am inclined to conclude, can the individual in question be called an *āchāryā*. If our *Āchāryā* who, even after having had Adhvaitic realization, viewed others to be different from himself-or gave the impression of doing so- and wrote works on *jnāna* meant for them, it means that he did so accepting the dualistic cosmos and, at the same time, wanting to correct it. Was not this the very purpose of his incarnation, of his being our *āchāryā*? One who imparts teaching to those ensnared in the dualistic world- would not such a one teach them to adore the *Śakthi* that is responsible for it? Is it not because of his concern for the world, his compassion for mankind, that he imparts his teaching that is meant to mend it? So will he not sing the praises of that which is the root cause of this love, '*Dayā-mūlathathvam?*' A *jnāni* does not have to gain anything. But when he resolves to perform the role of a teacher for the uplift of the world, will he not recognize that some force beyond him is impelling him to do so? So there is nothing contradictory about his composing hymns, bowing to that force in all humility.

That a *jnāni* gives instruction in *jnāna* is purely our own view of him or impression of him; as a matter of fact he has no consciousness of doing anything or of being a 'doer'. If you argue in this manner, it may justly be asked how the *jnāni* cannot also write devotional works. If it is claimed that the *jnāni* imparts his teaching, inspired by *Īśvarā*, for the well-being of the world, why cannot he be similarly urged by the Lord to compose devotional works for the same purpose? If *Īśvarā* inspires a *jnāni* to work for the welfare of mankind until he exhausts his past or *prārabdha karmā*, we must ask whether such well being is brought about only by giving instruction in *jnāna*. The majority of people are afraid of following the path of *jnāna* regarding it as too 'big' or too difficult for them. So working for the good of mankind must also mean promoting devotion. It must also mean going on pilgrimage to temples, installing yantras, performing puja and so on.

According to one school of thought the *jnāni* has no *prārabdha* or past *karmā*, Even if you accept such a view, the question arises why he should perform outward work at all? We have to answer the question by saying that it is *Īśvarā* who makes him do such work for the well being of mankind. In keeping with this argument this work must also include the nurturing of devotion.

Having said all this there is nothing that is conclusively to be determined about the *jnāni*. Though we have spoken so much about his characteristics, the fact is only a *jnāni* knows who is a *jnāni*, what he is like- or even he himself may not know what he is like. In the end it is meaningless to ask whether the *jnāni* will support the path of *karmā* or foster the way of bhakti. He may do anything or he may not do anything. Even while doing *karmā* he may not be doing work and even while not working he may be working. [The Great Guru continues with a smile,] The distinguishing mark of a *jnāni* is that he has no distinguishing mark.

As for the *Āchāryā* he was an incarnation of *Īśvarā*, so he had nothing like any past *karmā*. All divine incarnations happen for the purpose of the uplift of mankind. Whenever *Īśvarā* resolves to descend to earth for the uplift of mankind it means that he looks upon the world as separate from himself. The purpose of his incarnation is to bring people who are separate entities closer to himself, little by little, and finally to make them himself. It is only after a man performs works according to his *svadharma* (or one's duty) and engages himself in devotion, and thus advances gradually, that he will be able to follow the path of *jnāna* and become an *Adhvaithi* (achieve liberation). So a divine incarnation has to foster the path of *karmā* as well as the path of devotion. All *avatārās* have lived as pathfinders for mankind, and fostered Vedhic *karmā* and devotion. So there is no contradiction in the fact that the *Āchāryā* was a *jnāni* and that he yet worshipped in temples, installed yantras, laid down rules for temple rituals and composed devotional works.

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THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE 'SAUNDARYLAHARĪ'

Our *Āchāryā* worshipped in temples in the same way as ordinary mortals do and, through his godly power, enhanced the divine presence in some of these shrines by installing yantras in them. In the course of his pilgrimages he went to Kailas and had *dharsan* of *Pārvathi* and *Paramēśvarā* there. He was himself (let us remember) their incarnation.

Rama, an *avatārā* himself, fought with *Parasurāmā* who too was an *avatārā* like him. *Krishṇa* was the brother of another incarnation [of *Vishṇu*] Balarama, and they lived together. There are many such interesting facts about *avatārās*.

Now the *Āchāryā* who was an *avatārā* himself had *dharsan* of *Pārvathi* and *Paramēśvarā*- the two were the Root from which he

himself had sprung. At the time *Paramēśvarā* gave him five sphatika (Crystal) lingas and a sheaf of palm-leaves. Another version has it that the palm-leaves were given by *Pārvathi*. The palm leaf manuscript contained a hymn of one hundred stanzas to *Pārvathi*. One version has it that it had been composed by *Paramēśvarā* himself as a panegyric to *Pārvathi*; the second version is that like the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam* (the One thousand Names of *Lalithā*) it is the work of *Vāsini* and others, the deities of speech. To regard the verses as a hymn sung by *Paramēśvarā* himself in the attitude of a devotee of *Ambāl* is to enhance their greatness.

The five lingas are each of them *Īśvarā*'s own form. ('Linga' means a mark, a sign.). The linga has no hands, legs and head and in that sense is formless. The stanzas of the palm-leaf manuscript themselves constitute *Ambāl*. It is so because among the goddess's many forms is the one that is made up of manthras. The hundred stanzas contained chiefly matters relating to *Ambāl* and manthra *Śāsthra*. Just as the lingas are a form of *Īśvarā*, the palm leaves containing the hymn became a form of *Ambāl*. So it is just and proper to say that while the lingās were given to the *Āchāryā* by *Īśvarā*, the hymn was presented to him by *Ambāl*.

The one who gave, the one who received, the object that was given, they were all one and the same. Here we have a mingling of *Adhvaitha* and *Dvaitha*.

One of the five lingas is installed in the *Mutt* (*Sri Kāmakōti, Kānchi*) as *Chandramaulīśvarā*. It is called the *Yōgalinga*. The other four the *Āchāryā* installed are the *Muktilinga* at *Kēdārinātha* (*Kēdārnāth*) the *Varalinga* at *Nilakantha* (in Nepal), the *Bhōjalinga* in *Srungeri* and the *Mōkshalinga* at *Chidambaram*. All this is a part of a later story.

The *Āchāryā* set out from *Kailāsā* taking with him the five lingās and the hymnal work. He wanted to propagate the worship of

Īsvarā and *Ambāl*. As he was leaving *Kailāsā*. *Nandikēśvara* who was keeping watch at the entrance saw the palm leaves in the hands of the *Āchāryā*. There is a saying: Even if the deity grants you a boon, the pujari denies it. *Nandikēśvara* was distressed that the manthra *Śāsthṛā*, a very great treasure, was being lost to *Kailāsā*. He was given to quick temper. His distress turned into anger. He proved an obstruction to the *Āchāryā* as the latter was leaving *Kailāsā* and pulled at the palm-leaf manuscript he was holding in his hand.

The *Āchāryā* managed to come out with only a part of the manuscript. More than half of it, the latter part comprising 59 stanzas, had been snatched away by *Nandikēśvara*. The *Āchāryā* was left with 41 stanzas.

Perhaps you must be angry with *Nandikēśvara* for what he did. 'How could he have behaved so with such a great one as the *Āchāryā*?' you will ask. How could he take away more than half the work *Ambāl* herself had given the *Āchāryā* to be propagated on earth?' But I feel like thanking *Nandikēśvara* profusely. Why?

The *Āchāryā* was extremely unhappy about what had happened. 'More than half of what *Ambāl*, the mother, gave me in her grace I have lost. What she entrusted to me was like the dharmic treasure a trustee takes charge of for the sake of the people,' thus the *Āchāryā* lamented. '*Śāṅkaram lōka-śāṅkaram*': (true to these words) he was spending every moment of his life for the well being of mankind. 'In the end, ' he grieved, ' I have lost more than half of what the World Mother gave me before I could present it to the world.'

At that moment was heard the voice of *Ambāl* commanding him, 'You compose yourself the 59 stanzas you have lost. Such is my resolve. That is what will please me. And that is why I made you lose the same'. At once the stanzas poured out from the *Āchāryā* like water gushing out as the sluice gates of an oceanic

canal are opened. He described *Ambāl* from head to foot (*kēsādhī-pādāntam*’) and made the hymn complete with its 100 stanzas.

The first 41 stanzas constitute manthra *Śāsthrā*. Only a few can understand them and follow them in practice since very stringent rules are called for in their observance. This part contains manthra *yōga* as well as *Kundalini yōga*. Even the slightest error in the observance of these *yōgās* can have an adverse effect on the practitioner. One cannot be careless in worshipping the Mother. She sports in many ways. Though she has laid down harsh rules for worship, involving severe discipline, she has also prescribed easy ways of *sādhanā*. Each way of worship has to be practiced strictly in the manner prescribed. Worshipping in temples, reciting stothras or hymns, singing devotional musical compositions, conducting bhajans, listening to stories, *purānāns*, these are among the easy ways of worshipping *Ambāl*. If a devotee thinks that these are not enough and wants to take up other ways of worship like japa, *yōga* and *Śrīchakra pūjā*, believing that he can practice them in any manner he likes, without the required discipline, *Ambāl* would consider it sheer wantonness on his part. The difficult ways of *sādhanā* in the worship of *Ambāl* must be left to those few who are capable of practicing them.

The *Āchāryā*’s compassion was supreme and it embraced all people. There is a song in Kannada which includes this line about him: ‘ He (*Śankarā*) made the sinner the *Paramāthmā*.’ The *Āchāryā* portrays *Ambāl* in his 59 stanzas not as an embodiment of manthras but as a beautiful form that can be visualized by all people with delight. He depicts the goddess graphically from the locks of her hair to her sacred feet. The glorious image of the Mother takes shape through his poetry: in other words *Ambāl* is his poetry incarnate.

The 59 of the 100 stanzas constitute a separate section, ‘*Saundaryalahari*’, while the first 41 are said to constitute

‘*Ānandalahari*’. The two parts comprising the 100 stanzas must be read together as making up a single hymn. The entire work, consisting of both parts, is also called *Saundaryalaharī*.

The story I told you of the *Āchāryā*’s visit to *Kailāsā* and his obtaining from *Pārvathi* and *Paramēśvarā* the five lingas and the sheaf of palm leaves containing the *Saundaryalaharī* occurs in the *Mārkandēya-Samhitā*. Closely following this account, the *Ānandagiriya-Sankaravijayam* tells the same story in prose.

There are other stories too about the origin of the *Saundaryalaharī*. Many are of the opinion that all the 100 stanzas are the work of *Śankarā* himself.

There is nothing wrong in ascribing the entire work to him even if we think that the first 41 stanzas were brought by him from *Kailāsā*. These stanzas had been inaccessible to us. The rishis did not create the *Vēdhic manthras*. The sounds that were already existing in space they grasped and presented in a form audible to us; at the same time they also disseminated them,. However, each mantra is known after a particular rishi on account of the fact that it was revealed to us and propagated by him. Following this logic the first 41 stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī* which constitute a mantra *Śāsthṛā* may well be known after *Śankarā* since it was he who brought them from *Kailāsā* to be propagated in this world.

Another point. If *Paramēśvarā* is the author of the *Saundaryalaharī*, what about the *Āchāryā*? Who was he? Was not the *Śankarā* of Kāladi an incarnation of the *Śankarā* of *Kailāsā*? So there is nothing wrong in ascribing the work by the *Kailāsā Śankarā* to the *Kāladi Śankarā*.

The first 41 stanzas deal with subtle ideas of mantra *Śāsthṛā*, Kundalini yōga and the esoteric elements in the worship of *Mahā-Thripurasundari* also known as *Srīvidhyā*. It contains matters that are extremely useful to the devotee. However, the latter part comprising the 59 stanzas, the authorship of which is

ascribed to the *Āchāryā*, is beautiful beyond words. The stanzas combine majesty and sweetness of expression, representing as they do the highest thoughts that words can convey and they arouse our sense of wonder. They are incomparable for beauty of expression and depth of meaning. It is this part that can be read again and again by all for the ineffable joy it brings.

There are sculptures of exquisite beauty created in the past. People belonging to later generations have found themselves unable to repair them if they are seen damaged. Such is the case with the stanzas of our *Āchāryā*'s *Saundaryalaharī*. Take out one word of it, you will never be able to find a proper substitute for it.

What the *Āchāryā* lost to *Nandikēśvarā*- more than half of the original hymn *Ambāl* had given him- has been a gain for us. Otherwise would we have come to know of the *Āchāryā*'s astounding literary genius? That is why we feel we must be thankful to *Nandikēśvarā*. If the *Āchāryā* had not been 'waylaid' by him and a part of the hymn snatched away, would we have come to possess such stanzas as inspire in us devotion for *Ambāl*, stanzas that we read again and again and take delight in reciting?

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WHY THE DRAMA ENACTED BY NANDHIKĒŚVARĀ?

The Question arises: 'Why should *Ambāl* have given the *Āchāryā* the text of an old hymn, made him lose one part of it and have the portion thus lost made up with the verses composed by the *Āchāryā* himself? Could she not have bidden him compose an entire hymn afresh? Also, why should she have given him a work of which only one part was to be made available to the world?' We have no idea of the nature of her resolve, nor do we understand her *līlā*, her sport. But some reasons occur to me.

There are two ways of worshipping *Ambāl*. Manthra *yōgā* is one. The other is devotion expressed through hymns that satisfy

all the criteria of great poetry. Practitioners of manthra *yōgā* must not look down upon those who read or sing hymns. 'Like us do they follow a severe discipline or observe rules of worship? ' They should not speak thus of people singing hymns, people of simple faith and devotion. As for those who follow the path of bhakti, those who keep singing hymns, they should not ask questions in this manner of the practitioners of manthra *yōgā*: 'Like us they cannot see the World Mother with love, chanting always 'O Mother'. Nor can they fix their minds on her, experiencing with poetic delight the beauty of her form, her diverse enchantments, the different ways in which she sports. What is this drab and arid path they follow of manthra and thanthra?

There are different paths of worship for people with different attitudes. The man who practices manthra and thanthra may also like to adore *Ambāl* through devotional poetry. So *Ambāl* must have thought that it would be desirable to have a work which could be read by people following either path. Even those who have not received initiation into manthra *yōgā* can benefit to some degree by reading the 41 stanzas forming the first part of the *Kailāsā* hymn. Also they will gain basic knowledge of manthra *Śāsthṛā*, Kundalini *Yōgā*, *Srīvidhyā* and such ancient subjects that form part of our nation's spiritual wealth. It must have been thought proper to have a single work incorporating all these elements, a melodious devotional hymn of poetic excellence.

It may be asked why *Ambāl* did not bid the *Āchāryā* himself to compose a new hymn combining both (manthra *Śāsthṛā* and devotion). After all there was no manthra *Śāsthṛā* that was not known to him. There is an answer to this question also.

We do not know what the original hymn of *Kailāsā* contained after the first 41 stanzas. May be it dealt with additional matters pertaining to *manthra Śāsthṛā*, subtle and esoteric elements of it that are not available to this world of mortals and fit only for the

divine world. So *Ambāl* must have asked *Śāṅkarā* to add to the *manthra Śāsthā* appropriate to this world (the first part) a section rich in poetic beauty.

Above all, it must be noted that it was only by making the *Āchāryā* compose the second part that it could be brought home to people that he and *Paramēśvarā* are the joint authors of the work; the first part by the *Śāṅkarā* of *Kailāsā* and the second part by the *Śāṅkarā* of *Kāladi*. This would make them further realise that the two *Śāṅkarās* are one and the same.

Ambāl must have staged the *Nandikēśvarā* drama for the purpose of revealing to the world a single work, by combining the part composed by the Lord *Paramēśvarā* and the part composed by the incarnation of the Lord.

Another question may arise here. 'Why should *Nandikēśvarā* have been made to waylay the *Āchāryā* [to snatch away from him the 59 stanzas]? *Ambāl* herself could have given him the first 41 stanzas and said to him. 'These are taken from a work of one hundred stanzas. The remaining stanzas are not needed by the denizens of the earth. However, since the 59 were torn away from the one hundred, compose the same number of verses to make it *sathakam* again and propagate the entire hymn among mankind.'

Ambāl could not have spoken in this manner. The reason is that, although the *Āchāryā* was the same as the *Śāṅkarā* of *Kailāsā*, in his disguise of an *avatārā* he was the picture of humility. Was not that the reason why he went seeking *Pārvathī* and *Paramēśvarā* and prostrated himself before them? After giving him one part of the work composed by *Īśvarā*, *Pārvathī* would not have asked one like the *Āchāryā* to compose the missing part. That would have meant equating him with *Īśvarā* and it would have also meant that she failed to recognize that he was the ideal of humility in the disguise of his *avatārā*. However, if a 'situation' was created in which the *Āchāryā* was deprived of a part of the work (given by *Paramēśvarā*)

and he suffered anguish on that account, *Ambāl* could tell him: Don't worry about what has happened. Make up yourself the portion you have lost.' This would be the natural way of meeting the situation and there would be no suggestion of the *Āchāryā* being shown as an equal of *Īśvarā*. That is the explanation for the drama enacted by *Nandikēśvarā*.

Once upon a time there was a king and he had a son who was equal to him in all respects. All the subjects knew this. The son, in keeping with his filial duty, remained obedient to his father and his conduct had the approval of all people. Suppose the queen, the mother, conscious of the fact that her son was equal to her husband in every respect, had told the prince, 'You rule half of it'. Would that have been proper? But suppose, again, that an enemy had invaded the Kingdom and occupied half of it. The queen could tell the prince: 'Free that part of the kingdom which has been occupied by the enemy and keep guard over it' That would have been proper.

One's interest is awakened with a keen sense of anticipation when a subject or idea is merely hinted at or suggested without it being disclosed fully or all too directly. It was in this manner that *Ambāl* created a situation in which the *Āchāryā* and *Īśvarā* were shown to share the authorship of the same hymn. Thus she hinted at the fact that the *Āchāryā* was an incarnation of *Īśvarā*. *Nandikēśvarā* is as famous for his quick temper as *Nārādā* is for creating discord. But it is all ultimately for the good. *Nandikēśvarā* was a mere instrument in the hands of *Ambāl*. She made him 'waylay' the *Āchāryā* and used the occasion to demonstrate to the world how he, that is the *Āchāryā*, was true to his dharma as a sannyasi. According to this dharma, a sannyasi must not feel angry towards an opponent nor must he quarrel or fight with him.'

After the conclusion of the *Nandikēśvarā* drama, *Ambāl* asked the *Āchāryā* to complete the hymn.

The result of all this is that we have come to possess a wonderful hymn that is unique in world literature. Its first part is such that it can be said of it: 'As a hymnal work there is nothing to compare with it for its treatment of subtle elements of manthra *Śāsthā*. Of the second part it can be said that 'there is no other hymn that is equal to it in poetic imagination'. Such is the *Saundaryalaharī* with its two sections.

The poem is a remarkable combination of *Śāsthā* (that of manthra as well as that of *yōgā*), *sthōthrā* (hymn) and *kavitā* (poetry). If there is anything approaching it as a work combining all these three aspects we may mention the *Lalithā Sahasranāmam* (The One Thousand Names of *Lalithā*).

A remarkable feature of the *Saundaryalaharī* is that in the first part which mainly deals with *Śāsthā* (*Śāktha*) there are stanzas brimming over with devotional fervour as well as those characterised by poetic beauty. It is in the first part that we have the stanza containing the words 'japō jalpah', representing the height of devotional ecstasy and self-surrender to the goddess; the attitude spoken of here is that everything is the doing of *Ambāl*, that all is dependent on her grace and will. In the same part occurs another stanza with the word 'Bhavāni'. It is in the form of a pun and the word 'Bhavāni' is used to describe the attitude of the devotee dualistically as well as non-dualistically. In the former attitude he is a 'dasa' a minion, while in the latter he is one with *Ambāl*. There are a few more verses like these in the part dealing with manthra *Śāsthā*.

But in the latter part dealing with devotion there is hardly any *Śāktha* element. If you search hard you may come across one or two stanzas like the one in which occur the words, 'Kathastē manjastvam'. Here it is mentioned that *Ambāl* in her form of *Kāmēśvari* is seated with *Kāmēśvara* on the *PanchaBrahmāsanā*. In

another stanza there is a reference to the Vēdhantic concept that beyond the three states is the fourth state of thuriya. But for a few verses like these the second part of the work is all devotional poetry. That the title of the hymn has the word 'Saundarya' in it shows that its importance lies more in its poetry than in the *Śāsthā* it deals with. Although those who have commented on the work express the view that the latter part also deals with the finer aspects of the *Śāsthā* (*Śāktha*), I somehow feel that it would be better to take it as a devotional poem. Moreover, if I were to speak out my view, whether or not I can do so... but let me express it frankly since it has occurred to me... Could not the entire work that the *Āchāryā* brought from *Kailāsā* have been seized by *Nandikēśvarā*, and could not the *Āchāryā* have composed all the 100 stanzas to portray the beauty of *Ambāl*? After all there are separate treatises dealing with manthras and yantras. Why should such subjects be included in a devotional poem? I say so because the *Āchāryā*'s composition (the latter part of the *Saundaryalaharī*) is such an exalted literary work, having all the characteristics of great poetry and capable of attracting the minds of people and leading them to the path of devotion.

In fine, the true greatness of this work lies in its being a devotional poem. It seems to me that, while composing the original *Kailāsā* hymn, apparently as a devotee of *Ambāl*, *Paramēśvarā* the omniscient, must have known that on its way to the world of mortals the *Āchāryā* would complete it as a work, overflowing with poetic flavour. That is why, in the first part of his work, he included stanzas that in their bhāva, rasa, and style anticipate the second part. It serves the purpose of the entire hymn bearing the stamp and style of a single composer.

I must mention one more point here. I said that the latter part of the hymn was all devotional but the stanzas comprising this part have also mantrik potency. Each of the 100 stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharai* can be recited as a manthra and each yields its

own separate fruit. This applies also to the stanzas of the second part describing the beauty of *Ambāl*. Since it is all the 'word' of the *Āchāryā*, inspired by *Ambāl*, and even *bījāksharās*, it acquires the character of a manthra. Just as all that Midas touched became gold, all the words spoken by the *Āchāryā* are manthras. The water drawn from the well in our house has to be turned sacred by the chanting of manthras. The water from the Ganga is holy on its own (naturally holy). It is so not only when it is used to bathe *Viswanāthā* (the deity of *Kāśī*), but also when we use it to bathe ourselves, to irrigate the fields or to bathe the dead. Thus, though the subject matter of the *Āchāryā*'s composition is not manthra *Śāsthrā*, and though the work is better known for its poetic content, his words are imbued with the potency of manthras. While all his utterances have such power, we must in this respect make special mention of the *Saundaryalaharī* and the *Subrahmaṇya-Bhujangam*.

The *Āchāryā* filled up the missing part of a hymn that was originally wholly manthra *Śāsthrā* with stanzas composed by himself. These new stanzas too have special mantrik potency. It was when he fell ill once that he composed the *Subrahmaṇya-Bhujangam*. He believed that if he fell ill it was for the purpose of his composing a hymn that could be recited by all for relief from their afflictions. The *Subrahmaṇya-Bhujangam* is a manthra treatise and reciting it is a remedy for all diseases. As for the *Saundaryalaharī* its recitation, apart from bringing relief from illness benefits people in various other ways.

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THREE GREAT DEVOTIONAL HYMNS

The World Mother has been sung and worshipped in her form of *Lalithāmbikā* by many a great sage and by many a great poet. She has many other forms too like *Durgā*, *Kālī*,

Annapūrnēśvari and *Bhuvanēśvari*. I will now speak about *Lalithāmbāl* alone.

Lalithā is worshipped as *Rājarājēśvari*, *Kāmākshi*, *Kāmēśvari* and *Thripurasundari* according to the *Śrīvidhyā thanthra*. The *Lalithā Sahasranāmam*, the *Lalithā Thrisathī*, the *Lalithā-Ashtōtharam* (that is *Ashtothara-Śātham*) and so on contain the different names of *Lalithā*, the supreme deity of *Śrīvidhyā*.

Among the songs in praise of *Lalithā* three are pre-eminent. The *Āryā Dviśathī* by *Durvāsas*, the *Panchaśathī* by *Mūkā*, and the *Saundaryalaharī* by the *Āchāryā*. In chronological order the *Āryā Dviśathī* comes first, followed by the *Saundaryalaharī* and then by the *Panchaśathī*. The *Saundaryalaharī* thus occupies, among the three, a central and commanding position.

The authors of these three works are our own (they belong to us) . They are closely related to us and are specially connected with Sri *Kāmākshi*, the presiding deity of our Pītām. It was *Durvāsas* who created the manual of worship for the *Kāmākshi* temple (*Kāmakōhsta*); puja is performed even today according to this manual. Everyone knows the *Āchāryā*'s connection with *Kāmākshi* and the *Kāmakōti Pītām*. *Mūka* became a poet through the grace of *Kāmākshi* and the hymn he has composed in 500 stanzas is in praise of her.

As I said, the *Āryā Dviśathī* is the oldest of the three. '*Dviśathī*' means two hundred. It is so called because it has 200 stanzas devoted to Devi. It is composed in the rare metre called '*Āryā*'. Besides the subject of the hymn is also *Āryā*, that is *Ambāl*.

This does not mean that *Ambāl* is an Āryan deity, nor a Dravidian one. The word '*Āryā*' means one who is 'exalted' and it does not denote any race. Giving it a racial connotation is a perversion to be attributed to the White man. *Ambika* is the highest of the high.

Because of their learning, conduct, character and other qualities Brahmins were regarded by others as belonging to a higher plane and came to be called 'Ayyars'. Even so the term denotes a *jāti* and not a race. All the four *jātis*, to be precise all the four *varnas* belong to the same race. All the hundreds of *jātis* have originated from these four *varṇas*. 'Ayyar', 'Ayyangār', 'Mādhva' are from the same *varṇa*. In the same Vaiṣya *varṇa* there are several sects. Neither in the Gita nor in the *Dharma Śāstrhās*, in fact in none of the texts in which *Chaturvarṇya* (the system of four *varnas*) is mentioned, is there any reference to the first *varṇa*, or the first two *varnas*, or the first three *varnas*, as belonging to a particular race (that is the Āryan race). Also the fourth *varṇa* is not mentioned anywhere as belonging to a separate race (that is the Dravidian race).

Āryā is the name of *Ambāl*. Our *Āchārya*'s mother was *Āryāmbāl*. The devotional poem of 200 stanzas by *Durvāsas*, apart from being in the *Āryā* metre, is in praise of *Āryā*, that is *Ambāl*; so its name *Āryā Dvisathī* is appropriate (denoting as it does the metre of the poem as well as the subject). It is known by another title, *Lalithā-stava-ratnam*: it means a gem among the hymns adoring *Lalithā*.

It is customary to refer to Ambika as 'Bhattārikā' - That is why three of her outstanding devotees have each the title of 'Bhattārakā'. One of them is *Īsvarā* himself : he is referred to as 'Paramasiva Bhattārakā'. Another is *Mahākavi Kālīdāsā*. His literary genius and poetic muse are ascribed to the grace of *Mahākālī* of *Ujjayini*. He is the author of the *Śyāmaladhakam* and the *Navaratnamala* 'which are in praise of *Ambāl* and he is referred to as 'Śrungāra Bhattārakā'. If one *Bhattārakā* is a god, another is a mortal, a poet. There are two categories, 'ghana' and 'laghu' (weighty and light). A god is 'ghana', a mortal is 'laghu'. There was a 'Laghu Bhattārakā' who composed the *Pancha-Sthavi*

consisting (as the name suggests) of five hymns to *Ambāl*. There is a view that *Kālidāsa* who was a '*Manushya Bhattārakā*' was also called a '*Laghu Bhattārakā*'.

It is customary to speak of rishis as belonging to a category separate from those of the celestials and mortals. Sages like *Nārada* were *dēva* rishis born among the gods. There are numerous examples of rishis belonging to the human race. Whatever the category or race an individual belongs to, if he grasps the timeless manthras pervading space in a subtle form and presents them to us in a form audible to us, he must be said to belong to the special category of rishis. In Vēdhic rites there is one in which tharpana (libation) is offered separately to the gods, the rishis and the pithrus (fathers belonging to the human race). Among the three *Bhattārakās*, since *Īśvarā* is a god and *Kālidāsa* was a mortal, would it not be appropriate if the third was a rishi? This third *Bhattārakā* was *Durvāsa*. Among rishis he was one who received the grace of *Ambāl* in full. He was famed for his irascibility and so was called '*Krōdha Bhattārakā*'. Thus three *Bhattārakās* : *Paramaśiva Bhattārakā*, *Śrūṅgāra Bhattārakā* and *Krōdha Bhattārakā*.

Durvāsa, is the first belonging to this world to have composed hymns in praise of *Ambāl*. Apart from the *Dviśathī*, he composed another devotional poem to the glory of *Ambāl* entitled *Śakthi-mahimā-sthōthram*. That *Ambāl* manifested herself in his speech would be evident to those who read the *Dviśathī*.

In the yantra called *Śrīchakra* there are tiers of 43 triangles, shaped like a cone, and forming a circle round a central dot or Bindu. Just as there are fortresses of five, seven and so on encircling the *mūlasthāna* (of a temple) there are numerous deities in the *āvāraṇās* or enclosures.

In his hymn *Durvāsa* has described in detail *Kāmēśvari* in the form of *Rājarājēśvari* seated to the left of *Kāmēśvarā* on the

Bindu, adored by all the deities in the enclosures. His is an outstanding devotional work and reading it will bring divine blessings, among them particularly the gift of writing and poetry.

What is the greatest blessing Ambikā bestows on a devotee? It is the gift of speech, eloquence of a high order, that is employed in extolling her, in portraying her in various ways and experiencing bliss in it. And what is special about this gift? It enables a devotee to give expression to the bliss he delights in, thus making it known to others and enabling them to share in it.

Ambikā blessed a dumb devotee with the power of speech that could be said to be without bounds. We do not know his real name. He resided in the *Kāmākshi* temple and we know him as *Mūka*, meaning one who is dumb. The moment he received the grace of the goddess he brought down a shower of not just two hundred stanzas but of five hundred in praise of *Kāmākshi*. Durvāsā's work, is *Āryā-Dviśathī*. In *Mūka*'s *Panchasāthī*, the first one hundred stanzas are called the '*Āryāsathakam*' and they are in the *Āryā* metre. The second one hundred depict the beauty of the lotus feet of *Kāmākshi* and are aptly called '*Pādāravinda-sathakam*'. The third one hundred verses extol her greatness revealed in many ways and constitute the '*Sthuthi-sathakam*'. The fourth one hundred portray the goddess's sidelong glance and are called the '*Katāksha-sathakam*'. And, finally, the fifth one hundred stanzas describe her gentle smile and comprise the '*Mandāsmītasathakam*'. Thus the five hundred stanzas in all of the *Panchasāthī*.

The *Āryā-Dviśathī* and the *Mūka-Panchasāthī* are like the work of an inspired painter. They bring before our mind's eye a portrait of *Ambāl*. What is not accessible to the eye and the mind is brought close to us.

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THE *Saundaryalaharī*- ITS GRANDEUR

The greatness of the third work, the *Saundaryalaharī*, is obvious. One is led to say that never has there been a literary work which is comparable and never will be. Its beauty is such. Read or listen to it any number of times, you will never experience tedium from its beauty, nor will you find its sweetness cloying. The *Mūka-Panchāśathī* too has sweetness but the *Saundaryalaharī* has in addition depth. It is usually said that it is *Panchāśathī* for 'softness' [or smooth elegance] and the *Saundaryalaharī* for depth. This does not mean that the latter work is altogether lacking in softness. However, it cannot be claimed that it employs simple words.

Amongst the *Āchāryā*'s devotional compositions the *Bhaja Gōvindam* is the simplest and the easiest to understand. It is natural that the *Saundaryalaharī* should have a number of somewhat difficult words since precision is called for in conveying thoughts of a subtle nature. All the same, they have their own mellifluence. Once we understand the meaning of these words we will appreciate that no other word can serve in the context and we will then applaud the poetic excellence of the language. The *Āchāryā* composed the *Bhaja Gōvindam* in a simple metre, using simple words. Descriptive passages, metaphors and other figures of speech are not very much required to explain the A B C of spiritual matters, dharma and such other subjects. Here in the *Saundaryalaharī*, when the *Āchāryā* speaks about *Ambālī*'s beauty the style changes and with it the metre according to the needs of the subject - and it is a subject which demands the use of his poetic genius in different ways. He has composed this poem in the *Śikharinī* metre which has 17 syllables per foot. This metre becomes a *sikhara* in his hands (it takes his stanzas to the very peak of poetry) since it is particularly suited to describe the beauty of *Ambālī* fully and eloquently.

The *Āchāryā* has delineated *Ambāl*'s physical appearance and beauty from the 42nd stanza to the 100th. In this he has blessed us with a rain of words, with descriptive passages and with a portrayal of different aesthetic moods. The joy we derive from reading this will be no less than that of *Ambāl* appearing before our very eyes.

When a great sculptor creates a divine image in a spirit of devotion and dedication, it would seem as if the deity so sculpted truly dwells in the image. It is in this manner that the *Āchāryā* has composed the hymn, from an exalted plane, delighting himself again and again in the presence of *Ambāl*, in her beauty. And, throughout, he is moved by a spirit of dedication realising as he does that his perception and understanding of her and the words that pour out from his heart in describing her are but her own gift. The result is that the hymn itself becomes an image of *Ambāl* that is worthy of being extolled in a hymn of beauty.

How do we make a flower ornament for the hair that is gathered into a knot on the head? Flowers are strung together to make a garland. A number of such garlands are braided together and woven with gilt and *zari*. In the same manner the *Āchāryā* is seen here as an artist, and as a poet. He creates words out of syllables, he strings together the words into the feet of a stanza, then he connects together the stanzas to form an entire poetical work of devotion. If there is nectar in the flowers, the sweetness arising out of our aesthetic appreciation of the poem is nectar to our mind. But there is this big difference between the two: the garland of flowers fades with the efflux of time but the garland of poems keeps fresh for all time.

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A DIVINELY INSPIRED POET - IN TWO SENSES

There have been, and there are, many great poets. But there is difference between poets who are ordinary human beings and

other great poets with a streak of the divine in them. *Śankarāchāryā*, *Jnānasambandhar*, *Nammāzhvār*, *Sadāśivā Brahmēndrā* possessed poetic muse that was combined with divine inspiration. If a poet composes a poem inspired by *Īśvarā*, because of the Lord's grace his poetry transcends his own intelligence, reasoning and experience. The poetry of great men is divinely inspired in another sense. While such poetry gives aesthetic delight to those who read it, it also bestows on them divine grace. Generally speaking, the poetry of great men inspired by divine grace is such as to impart divine grace to its readers also.

The poetry composed by great men in a state of ecstasy aroused by their perception of the divine and during moments of self- forgetfulness is inspired by divine grace. *Sambandhamūrthi* says: 'My utterance is but your utterance.' The *Āchāryā* too, while concluding his *Saundaryalaharī*, says: 'Mother, this, your hymn, is made up of your own words.' It is not only that such poems are divinely inspired, the great men who compose them are themselves dispensers of blessings. The hymns, besides being the product of divine grace, are themselves capable of conferring grace on us.

These men of grace have no compulsion to compose poetry. When they can impart their blessings directly to people, why should they compose poetry to do the same? Only people who can actually see these men of grace can receive their blessings. Though such great men continue to bless us in their subtle form even after their departure, people like us are unfortunately not able to grasp them. Even the *Paramātmā* we can imagine only by trying to give Him a form.

The world had the *Āchāryā*'s *dharsan* only for 32 years. In the case of *Jnānasambandhar* it was only for half that period. Great men like them must have been, out of their compassion, anxious that even after their passing, people must have the benefit of their teachings. That is why they have gathered together all their grace,

compressed and packed it so to speak, in their poems, hymns and songs that keep blessing people generation after generation; indeed eternally. It means that the blessings of *Īśvarā* are received through the grace of these great men.

Through the *Saundaryalaharī* we receive the lahari or wave of grace of the *Āchāryā*. Here another idea comes to mind. The *Āchāryā* is grace incarnate, the abode of compassion. So receiving his grace is tantamount to seeing him in person. It follows that through his hymn of the *Saundaryalaharī* he not only brings us face to face with *Ambāl* but also grants us his own *dharśan*. In the end, who is she, who is he? The two are one and the same.

The world had the *dharśan* of the *Āchāryā* only for 32 years, when he dwelt in his body made up of the five elements. But he has adopted a new body called the *Saundaryalaharī* and in it he is present as sound which is but his form of grace transformed. And in this embodiment of sound that is the *Saundaryalaharī* he grants his *dharśan* as long as this world lasts.

Whatever hymn you recite with true feelings of devotion, why, even if you mumble it incoherently but with bhakti, you will receive the blessings of the Lord. But, unfortunately, such devotion is hard to come by. It is in this context that poetry that has the power to bless us comes to our help. Such hymns instil devotion in those who read them. When we recite the *Thevāram* of Appar, that is when we repeat the words that poured out of the saint-poet's heart, which had melted in devotion, they melt our hearts too and inspire bhakti in us. The *Saundaryalaharī* does not possess this quality to the same degree. All the same it attracts us with its aesthetic and poetic content and draws us towards *Ambāl*, filling us with feelings of devotion.

There is a devotional poetry which does not bestow grace on us because we are devout, nor does it inspire devotion in us, and reward us with blessings, but it brings us divine grace if we recite it

because of the special quality of its sound. The sound of such poems has divine power which manifests itself irrespective of whether or not those who read them are devout. Neither we need to be particularly devout, nor the poem need be specially meaningful, or capable of evoking aesthetic pleasure or be moving. However, the special nature of the sound of its words, it will be capable of capturing divine grace and making it available to us. This is what is called *manthrasakthi*, the potency of manthras. Words imbued with mantrik energy, if chanted repeatedly (if we keep muttering them, do japa), even without being aware of their meaning and without any emotional involvement, the divine power of their sounds will bring us manifold blessings. Many a great man has sung many a hymn. All their devotional works are noted for the meaning they convey, their poetic flavour, emotional content and so on. Combined with these qualities is the mantrik character of their sounds. We also note that there are two kinds of hymns: some are of a high order because of the ideas and meaning they convey; and some are notable for the blessings they bring us by their mantrik power.

None of the compositions of the *Āchāryā* can be said to be lacking in meaningfulness. Each is a mine of gems. There are two hymns of the *Āchāryā* that learned men have chosen for their mantrik power. As already mentioned, one of the two is the *Subrahmanya-Bhujangam*, the other is the *Saundaryalaharī*. It is not the first 41 stanzas alone of the latter work—they deal with manthra Sasthra - that have mantrik power. All the 100 stanzas have such power. The latter part of the composition comprising the stanzas that describe *Ambāl's* beauty can fetch the power of the divine because of the exalted nature of the sound of the verses and their high mantrik strength. Each of these stanzas will bring its own special benefit if recited repeatedly, that is in the manner of performing japa. Generation after generation, countless numbers of people have followed this practice and been rewarded. One has

to be initiated into this practice by a guru, in private, and one must understand the import conveyed by the verses.

As a devotional composition, or as a poem, anyone will find reading the *Saundaryalaharī* rewarding. But if it is regarded as a manthra *Śāsthṛā*, from which benefits are to be derived, one must be guided by a guru and one must observe a certain discipline.

There is another way of regarding the hymn.

All we have to do is to read the hymn, keeping in mind the one benefit of unflinching devotion to the goddess. All other benefits are encompassed by it and will naturally flow from it. You will not mind even if these other benefits do not come to you, or are not granted by *Ambāl*. If you are truly devoted you will not expect any reward.

The hymns composed by the *Āchāryā* to *Śiva*, *Vishṇu*, *Ambāl* and other deities are divinely inspired in two senses : I have explained this earlier. Apart from the '*Ānandalahari*', which forms the first part of the *Saundaryalaharī*, he has composed a separate work called the *Ānandalahari*. Then we have his long hymns to *Ambāl* like the *Dēvi Bhujangam*, the *Thripurasundari-mānasapūja-sthōthram*, the *Tripurasundari-Chathushshashtyupachāra pūjā-sthōthram*, the '*Thripurasundari Vēdha-pādha-sthavam*'. Then there are shorter hymns like the *Annapūrnāshtakam*, the *Ambāshtakam* and the *Bhavāni-Bhujanigam*. The *Āchāryā* has also composed hymns to the deities of temples like *Madurai Mīnākshi*, *Srungēri Śāradāmbāl*, *Śrīsailam Bhramarambāl*. Like his *Śivāparādha-kshamāpāṇa-sthōthram* is his *Kālī-sthuthi* which is a prayer to *Ambāl* to forgive us our sins. It (*Kālī-sthuthi*) is also called *Kālyaparādhahhanjana-sthōthram*. Knowledgeable people read this work religiously believing that it was written by the *Āchāryā* when he was in Bengal which is famous for *Śakthi* worship.

Though the *Āchāryā* has composed scores of devotional poems on various deities, his *Saundaryalaharī* is celebrated the world over as occupying the 'top' position. In the *Ashtōthara nāmāvali* [*Ashtōtharaśatham*, string of 108 names] to the *Āchāryā* himself, there is a reference to this fact: '*Saundaryalaharī-mukhya-bahusthōthra-vidhāyakāya-namah*': 'obeisance to the one who has created many hymns, chief among them being the *Saundaryalaharī*'.

There is no reference to any other hymn of his (in the *Ashtōthara nāmāvali*). Just as among his commentaries on works already existing [source books of Vedhantha] his expository treatise on the *Brahmasūthra* occupies the pre-eminent position, and among his original Vedhanthic works (*prakaraṇa granthas*) the *Vivekachūdāmaṇi* (The Crest Jewel of Discrimination) is the crest jewel, so among his devotional compositions the *Saundaryalaharī* occupies the highest place.

To people reading the *Saundaryalaharī* any number of hidden or inner meanings will reveal themselves according to their perception, maturity, learning, nature and standing in life. So many meanings [of the passages of the *Saundaryalaharī*] have suggested themselves to different devotees. This will be the case in the future also. We cannot say that 'it is all over with this'; new shades of meaning will keep emerging: it is like the water in a spring welling up as you keep digging the earth. I am here speaking to you about the meanings that occur to me and it does not mean that there is nothing more to be said. Those who keep digging deeper and deeper and keep diving deeper and deeper will come up with new gems. If, out of the compassion of *Ambāl*, one or more from among you present new meanings to me it will be a great *ratnābhishēka* or *muktābhishēka* for me.

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COMMENTARIES ON THE HYMN

Poetical works with literary flavour are interpreted according to our degree of maturity. Then there are verses that deal with manthra *Śāsthā* in an aphoristic manner and they are commented upon elaborately. The *Saundaryalaharī* is remarkable for its poetic beauty; at the same time it deals with subtle mantrik concepts. So it has come to have a large number of commentaries. It is learnt that there are 34 commentaries of the poem in Sanskrit, but all of them may not be available now. Of them the one by Lakshmidhara is particularly renowned. It is from *Bhāskararāya*'s commentary on the *Lalithā Sahasranāmam* that we have come to know many details with regard to Lalithōpāsana (the worship of *Lalithā*), also called *Śrividhyā Thanthra*. Like *Bhāskararāya* for the *Sahasranāmam* is Lakshmidhara for the *Saundaryalaharī*. Also famous to an extent are the commentaries by two distinguished scholars : (*Kaivalyāśrama* and *Kāmeśwara Sūri*) 'Saubāgyavardhini' and 'Arunāmōdini'. Recently we obtained the *Ānandagiri* commentary from the Manuscripts Library of Nepal. *Ānandagiri*, who was proficient in manthra *Śāsthā*, mentions that he wrote his commentary at the instance of the *Śankarāchāryā* of a mutt of his time. (*Ānandavāra Krutsna Śankarāchāryār*) Among the immediate disciples of *Ādhi Śankarā* there was one *Ānandagiri*. It is believed that he was the same as *Thōtakāchārya*. There is another *Ānandagiri* who wrote *tikas* or glosses for some of the *Āchāryā*'s *bhāshyas* (commentaries). There was one *Ānandagiri* among those who wrote the life of the *Āchāryā*- that is one of the '*Śankara vijayās*'. We have now learned that among the ancient commentators of the *Saundaryalaharī* too there was one with the same name.

Of the many commentaries of the *Saundaryalaharī* there is one called 'Gopalasundari'. A noteworthy features of it: the commentator claims that the work also sings the praises of *Vishṇu*. So his interpretation is from the standpoint of the worship of

Ambāl as well as of *Vishṇu*. Just as there is a special manthra that brings *Lalithāmbā* and *Krishṇa* together as *Gopalasundari*, there is a *Vaishṇava* exposition of our hymn to *Ambāl*.

Madhusūdana Sarasvathi who was a great exponent of *Adhvaitha* has similarly written a commentary on the *Sivamahimna-sthōthra* from the *Vaishṇava* angle.

The fame of the *Saundaryalaharī* could be gauged from the fact that palm-leaf manuscripts of the hymn and commentaries are to be found in every part of India and in libraries such as the Sarasvathi Mahal in Thanjavur, the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, Pune, and the Baroda Library. People in Kasmir believe that the *Āchāryā* composed the hymn in their land and they are proud of the fact.

Apart from being inscribed on palm-leaves, this work is also engraved on stone. The sanctum of *Sugandhakuntalambāl* in the *Mātrbhūtesvara* temple on the Rock Fort at Tiruchirapalli is particularly sacred. The goddess is called '*Mattuvār Kuzhali*' in Tamil. '*Thayumānavar*' (*Thayum Ānavar*) is the beautiful Tamil equivalent of '*Māthurbhūtesvara*'. The Mother Goddess in the temple here is *Mattuvār Kuzhali*. The sanctum itself is shaped like a *Śrichakra*. In nearby *Jambukeśvaram* (*Thiruvānaikā*) it was the *Āchāryā* who fixed the *Śrichakra thātankas* (ear-ornaments) on the ears of *Akhilāndēsvari*. The 41 stanzas, comprising the first part of the *Saundaryalaharī*, were inscribed on stone here long, long ago; and, it is said, at the instance of the *Āchāryā* himself. In the *Saundaryalaharī*, at the very beginning of his portrayal of *Ambāl* from her tresses of hair to her sacred feet (*keśādhi-pādāntam*), he extols the tresses of hair (Stanza 43). as-hair that is naturally sweet-scented (stanza 43). The *Āchāryā*'s connection with the sanctum of *Sugandhakuntalambāl* is appropriate.

It is believed that the *Saundaryalaharī* is inscribed on the walls of the edifice of *Pārvathi* and *Paramēśvarā* on *Kailāsā* and

that it was the work of Ganapati who had inscribed the *Mahābhārata* on the slopes of the Meru mountain. There is also a story that the Gandharva Pushpadanta, author of the *Śivamahimna-sthōthra*, engraved the hymn on the walls around *Kailāsā*. The fact that there are many such stories about the hymn speaks for its greatness.

I will mention a fact that is likely to astound people who think that all such accounts [as given above] are fictitious. The present story takes the *Saundaryalaharī* far beyond *Kailāsā* to America. You know that there is a place called Philadelphia City in Pennsylvania State in that country. In the Philadelphia Museum of Art there are many palm-leaf manuscripts and among them there is one of the *Saundaryalaharī*. What is interesting about it is that it carries a portrait of *Ambāl* along with each stanza to illustrate the idea or meaning it conveys. Each leaf has three stanzas and three pictures. In all there are 36 leaves or so. There are a number of Indologists in America and the palm-leaf manuscript of our hymn was bought as an art treasure at a very high price. The professor of Sanskrit in Pennsylvania University sent one leaf of the manuscript with its three stanzas to Raghavan (well-known Indologists Dr. V.Raghavan) of Madras University with a request to explain how the pictures served to interpret the meaning of the verses. I myself saw the palm-leaf with the three pictures when I visited the (Madras) University. On that leaf there was a picture by the side of each stanza. One of the verses - there is no description of *Ambāl*'s physical form in it - speaks of the goddess thus: 'You are the mind, you are space, you are wind....' (Stanza 35). Even this is illustrated symbolically. Another copy of this palm-leaf manuscript is in the Baroda Library. Somehow one copy went across to America.

The *Saundaryalaharī* has always enjoyed fame in Tamil Nadu. Many years ago *Virai Kavirāja Pandita* did a Tamil translation in verse. Now the hymn is very much in fashion.

Women form into groups and sing the verses, rendering them in various ragas (ragamalika). Such groups are to be met in all places.

Above everything else [speaking of the hymn] there is something specially important to us. Of the many forms of *Ambāl*, the beautiful *Rajarājēsvari* of the *Saundaryalaharī* dwells in the temple of our Mutt, *Kānchi Kāmākōshtha*. The *Kāmākshi* who is here is indeed *Rajarājēsvari*. The temple has many connections with the *Āchāryā*. It was here that he reestablished the *Kāmākōti Pīta* that had declined in between, and consecrated the *Śrichakra* as a forceful living entity. At the same place he ascended the *Sarvajna Pīta* (seat of omniscience). Here it was that he attained *videha mukti* (liberated, shedding his mortal coils). There is a life-size idol of the *Āchāryā* in the *Kāmākshi* temple. The *Āchāryā* has a great connection with the *Kānchi Kāmākshi* temple. His jayanti is observed for ten days starting from *Vaisakha Śukla Panchami* (the day of his *avatārā*). Every day, during these ten days, his processional image is taken out and installed outside the *Gāyatrī* mandapa on a seat facing *Ambāl*. Everyday 10 stanzas from the *Saundaryalaharī* are recited (thus 100 stanzas in 10 days). On the tenth day the processional image of the *Āchāryā* and the processional deity of *Ambāl* are kept in the *Śukravāra mandapa* in the outer ambulatory: the last ten stanzas, of the hymn are recited here. It is customary to honour the *Āchāryā*'s murti (the image) with *parivattam* (cloth tied round the head). It seems such honour as *parivattam* and *pattābhishēkam* (coronation) are bestowed on the *Āchāryā*'s murthi chiefly because he is the author of the *Saundaryalaharī*.

Why is the hymn considered so great? What is the reason for its being so popular? The chief reason is that it brings before us the *Paramātmā* in the form of Mother.

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MOTHER WORSHIP

Avvai (Tamil saint poetess) says that mother and father are the first gods we come to recognize. The *Vedhas* exhort us to think of mother as well as father as God. Both place mother first, before father.

‘Look upon mother as God.’ If we reverse the order of the words in the sentence, it will read, ‘Look upon God as mother.’ It is when we think of our mother as God that we think of *Ambāl* and worship her. There is greater joy in regarding the *Paramātmā* as Mother than in thinking of him in any other form because there is no one more loving than a mother. We feel free before our mother and do not fear her in the least. Nor are we shy in her presence. When we are with her there is no cause for fear or shyness. When fear grips a child it cries ‘Mother’ and goes and hugs her. All mental perversions that come with age get destroyed in her presence.

A mother’s love is unique; it is unalloyed and absolute. The mother loves her son with all her heart, no matter how he behaves, and she does not mind whether or not he has affection for her. We say, ‘The mother’s heart is like that of one mad with affection, the son’s heart is stone.’ The *Dēvi-aparādha-kshamāpana-sthōthram* has this: ‘A wicked son there may be, but a wicked mother never.’ We cling to our mother from the very moment of our birth. We are formed of her life, of her body, of the food she eats. From feeding us to everything else we are dependent on her from birth. It is in our childhood that our mother’s love is the most intense. It is then that our love for her is also the most intense. We are then totally dependent on her. It is now, when our mind is not disturbed by desire and carnal love, that she becomes our only refuge. It is in childhood that we surrender to her in the firm belief that ‘she is there to look after us, that she will do everything for us’. To have utter faith, to have the attitude of surrender, to have a mind that is

free from thoughts of desire and carnal love - it is in fact because of the godly nature inherent *in being* childlike that we think of the *Paramātmā* as Mother. Whether it is hungry, whether it longs for some plaything or other, whether it is suffering from some pain, whatever it is, the child clings to that one entity, the mother. Similarly, to hold on to the *Paramātmā* securely one must make oneself a child and look upon him as the World Mother. The Upanishads exhort us to make ourselves a child, to become a child.

To look upon the *Paramātmā* as the Universal Mother does not mean that we try to be happy thinking of an imaginary or non-existent entity. As a matter of fact the *Paramātmā* who is the source of all qualities has in him motherhood also. Is not the *Paramātmā* the root of all mothers of the world, all their filial affection, all their spirit of sacrifice? So, even if we do not imagine him to be one, the *Paramātmā* has motherhood overflowing in him. It is this that *Manikkavāchakar* refers to when he speaks of 'the One that is the supreme mother compassionate'. He also says: 'Father indeed is mother, the incomparable gem.' *Apparsvāmigal* exclaims, addressing the Lord: 'You are father, you are mother.' It is by perceiving the motherly character of the *Paramātmā* that these saint-poets have spoken thus.

However loving our mother is, our connection with her is not everlasting, since it will be severed when she dies or when we die. In different births we are born to different mothers. But the root or source of the love of all these mothers, the *Paramātmā*, is eternal. That is why the words, 'the continuing motherhood' - The *Paramātmā* is not merely the mother of the body that perishes but the mother compassionate of the imperishable life (or Self), protecting us here and hereafter. This *Paramātmā* is not the mother of just five or ten children, but the mother of all creatures including worms and other insects, elephants and lions, human beings and celestials. It is this Great Mother that creates not only the food needed by each and every being but also other objects

needed for their enjoyment. For the baby there is milk in the mother's breast and when it is in the womb it is fed through the umbilical cord connecting the two. Is such an arrangement made by each mother individually? No, there is a Great Mother, *Parāśakthi*, whose work it is.

The *Paramātmā* nourishes not only our body but also our life and is the mother who fosters our knowledge and makes us aware of the *Ātmā*. As mother he gives us milk to sustain our body, but what is more he gives us the milk of *jnāna* (enlightenment) that dissolves all distinctions such as mother and son and indeed makes the two one [with the milk of *jnāna* we become one with the *Paramātmā*].

Extending the logic that we must adore our mother in our present birth as God we must worship the *Paramātmā* as Mother since he is the cause of all our births and at the same time the cause of the cessation of our births.

We may think of the *Paramātmā* in any form we like and he will bestow his grace on us taking that form. If we pray to the *Parabrahmam* that he must become our mother, become Ambika, he will do so and bless us in answer to our prayer.

If you ask why the formless should have a form, it is because all of us have originated from that root and that root is our mother and we are its children. Leave aside the fact that we too are formless, that we too are the *Ātmā*; that is something of which we have no awareness yet. All that our mind can grasp now is that the multifarious forms of life, animals, birds and so on, must have a root: Also note how all those belonging to the same species are similar. This root is mother and all those who have sprung from this root are her children.

The child wants to see its mother; it wants her to be by its side. What is the point if she leaves its food in any place she likes and disappears? The child will not touch that food; she must

present herself before the child and feed it herself. More than the food what it wants is its mother. It is happy if it can see her, if she is by its side. It is not enough if she keeps calling from somewhere inside the house, 'My darling child, my prince!' The child must see her. The mother must lift it up and carry it in her arms. When it looks at her face it smiles happily. We too are children of *Parāśakthi*. We too feel that it is not enough to know that a formless *Parāśakthi*, *Parāśakthi* that is a concept, is protecting us. *Parāśakthi* must come before us lovingly to protect us and she must come in a form that we can see. Only then will we find happiness and fulfillment.

If we wish to perceive the *Paramātmā* as the embodiment of compassion that is supreme, then there is no form other than that of *Ambāl* to represent it. For the child its mother, for the calf the cow.

Likewise for all creatures, throughout all their births, at any time, *Paradēvatā* (*Parāśakthi*) is the mother. If we love her lotus feet with all our heart there will be fullness in our life. If we worship her as Mother such love will naturally begin to flow as a flood from our hearts. When we meditate on *Ambāl* ceaselessly, such meditation itself will become the sacred water to relieve us of our pain and to wipe away all our sins. This it is that is the spring of all love.

We often say, 'Brothers and sisters': these words used in a public lecture or in writing come only from our lips. For such words to be sincerely felt we must realize inwardly that all of us have in truth the *Paramātmā* as the One Mother, which sentiment is reflected in the words of *Kālidāsa*, '*Namasthē jagadēkamāthāh*' (*Syāmaḷādhandakam*) (obeisance to you, the One Mother of the World). The love that inspires us to embrace all creatures as our brethren will spring in our hearts when we become aware that there is but one mother common to all of them and to us.

DEVI IN SACRED LITERATURE

For the reasons mentioned above, the *Paramātmā*, in his feminine form of Mother, has been worshipped from Vēdhic times. Vēdhic hymns like the '*Śrīsūktam*', the '*Durgāsūktam*', the '*Rātrisūktam*' and the '*Dēvisūktam*' and the praises addressed to Ushas (goddess of dawn), Adhithi and so on are part of the tradition of *Dēvi* worship. Of the 108 Upanishads there are three centred on *Ambāl*. In the *Mahābhārata* we see that Arjuna worships *Durgā*, and in the *Bhāgavatam* we note that the gopis and Rukmini adore *Ambāl* to win a good husband. Great seers like Hayagriva, Agastya and *Durvāsas* have sung the praises of the goddess. Poets like *Kālīdāsa* too have composed numerous hymns to her.

The Tamil *Thēvāram*, *Thiruvāchakam*, *Thirumurai* and *Divyaprabandham*, as they extol *Śiva* or *Vishṇu* as the case may be, do so along with singing the praises of *Ambāl* or *Lakshmi* (*Ambāl* together with *Śiva* and *Lakshmi* together with *Vishṇu*).

The chief reason why the *Saundaryalaharī* has a pre-eminent place (among devotional hymns) is that it is a poem on Mother who is so dear to us and who is so intimately connected with us. Also the one who has composed it, the *Āchāryā*, is not only the recipient of the blessings of *Ambāl*, he is indeed an aspect of hers. That the great *Āchāryā* who is an exponent of Adhvaitha, which speaks of a Reality that has neither a name nor a form, is the author of the work makes it glorious beyond words.

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THE TWO 'LAHARIS' AND THEIR NAMES

Why the name '*Saundaryalaharī*'? '*Saundaryam*' means 'beauty'. What is '*sundaram*' is '*saundaryam*'. '*Lahari*' means a flow, a wave; it is also understood as a 'big wave' or as a 'billow'. The meaning proper here (in the title of the hymn) is 'a flow that

comes in wave after wave' , 'beauty that comes cascading and in a flood' .

The source of all beauty in the world is the *Paramātmā*. This hymn is called '*Saundaryalaharī*' because it portrays the beauty of the *Paramātmā-Śakthi* in the form of Mother, describing her from head to foot.

A work consisting of a hundred stanzas is usually called a '*sathakam*'. There is a hymn to *Sūrya* (the Sun God) called *Mayūraśathakam*. I have already told you about *Mūka*'s *Panchasathī* consisting of five parts, each called a *sathakam*. The entire composition comprising the five *sathakams* is *Panchasathī*. I also told you about *Dvīsathī* by *Durvāsas* which has two *sathakams*.

Neither of the *Āchāryā*'s devotional works, each consisting of a hundred stanzas, the one addressed to *Śiva* and the other to *Ambāl*, is called a '*sathakam*'. Both have 'lahari' in their titles. We do not know whether the *Āchāryā* himself gave these titles to his works or whether others gave them - or did the titles 'happen' on their own? Of the two hymns, the one in praise of *Īśvarā* is the *Śivānandalahari* and the second, devoted to *Ambāl*, is the *Saundaryalaharī*.

The two compositions have come from the *Āchāryā* as a river in flood breaking over its embankments and originating from the heights of devotional fervour. They are not the outcome of deliberation but the spontaneous outpouring of his inner experience that is like water welling up in a spring and flowing in waves. That is how the word 'lahari' used in the title must be considered apt.

Since the hymns take the form of a flood that comes in waves we too float in them. If they were known as '*sathakams*' it would mean that with the hundredth stanza we would reach the shore

[that is our poetic and devotional journey would come to an end with the hundredth *śloka*]. But the word 'lahari' in the titles suggests that without reaching the shore we could continue to keep floating in the hymns, or to keep swimming or boating in them for as long as we like. In other words, we do not stop abruptly with the hundredth stanza with which the *Āchāryā* concludes either work. The divine joy we derive from reading the hymns we will continue to experience in a heightened manner as we picture to ourselves the beauty streaming in a flood from *Ambāl* and the sport of *Īsvarā* manifested in waves. Without setting a limit to the devotee's imagination—which would have been the case had the hymns been called '*sathakams*'—the *Āchāryā* seems to suggest through the word 'lahari' in the titles: 'Let your thoughts that keep revolving round and round the divine Father and Mother be such as can become a continuous flow, thoughts occurring to you according to your different perceptions of the hymns.'

The *Āchāryā* is as humble, and as modest, as he is intellectually eminent and spiritually great. So he does not claim that he has risen to the heights of devotional fervour and that his hymns flowed from them as a stream (that is 'lahari'). However, the titles *Śivānandalahari* and *Saundaryalaharī* occur in the text of the two respective hymns. This is particularly noteworthy. This does not seem to be the case with the *Āchāryā*'s other works. You may ask, 'Take the example of *Bhaja Govindam*. Is not this title taken from the very first words of the hymn?' The answer is it is not so. The title of what we call *Bhaja Govindam* is actually *Mōha-Mudgaram*. '*Mudgaram*' means a (horse) whip. That which splits one's *mōha* (delusion) is '*mōha-mudgaram*'. But the hymn is sung as a musical composition. At the end of each stanza there is a refrain, '*Bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam, mūdha-mathē*'. People came to identify the hymn with '*Bhaja Govindam*' and the two words came to be used as its title. It is only

in the two 'lahari hymns' that the words occurring in their respective texts - 'Ānandalahari' and 'Saundarvalahari'-became their titles.

Let us see where the Āchāryā uses these terms (the titles of the two hymns). First *Śivānandalahari*. The very first of the 100 stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī* starts with these words, 'Śivah Śakthyā yukthō', that is it starts with the name of Śiva. Later in the text also it is mentioned that *Ambālī* takes great delight in listening to the praises of Śiva sung by Sarasvathi (Stanza 66). So it would please *Ambālī* if we examined *Śivānandalahari* first.

'*Śivānandalahari*' means the joy that comes as a flood as we become aware of Śiva or 'Śivam'. In other words it is knowing inwardly all the countless auspicious qualities of Śiva, his glory, his grace, his might, and how he sports in his various forms-the burning of *Kāma*, the destruction of *Kālā* and of *Thripura*, his wandering as a mendicant in the *Dhāruka* forest, his marriage to *Pārvathi*, *Kailāsā dharṣana*, his dance as *Nataraja*, his taking the form of a hunter, how *Brahma* and *Vishṇu* went in search of his head and feet respectively.

The same Śiva when internalised without a form is known as 'Śivam'. According to the *Māndūkya Upanishad*, when a seeker transcends the states of wakefulness, dream and sleep and comes to the state in which he realizes that the *Ātmā* is One and only one-that is when he arrives at the fourth state called 'thruriya', with the realization that the universe itself is absorbed in this state and experiences *Śivam*, that is the one and only Reality -- he himself becomes *Śivam*. Thus the hymn brings us twofold bliss in speaking about the two types of Śiva: the '*Lilānanda*' with regard to Śiva and the '*Ātmānanda*' with regard to *Śivam*. '*Śivānandalahari*' is the proper name for it since the two types of bliss rise as a cascade from it.

Let us see in what context the *Āchāryā* uses the term '*Śivānandalahari*'. In the very first stanza he pays obeisance to *Pārvathi* and *Paramēśvarā*. Such is the tradition - to speak of *Śiva* together with *Ambāl* as '*Śāmbāmūrti*' or '*Śāmbāsiva*' (*sa + Ambāl* = *Śāmba*, meaning 'together with *Ambāl*'). The *Āchāryā* first refers to *Śiva* and *Śakthi* as a pair. In the next stanza he uses the term '*Śivānandalahari*', while concluding the verse thus.

What does the *Āchāryā* say here? He refers to the river of bliss that devotion to *Paramēśvarā* is, mentions where it rises, what it does during its course and where it has its confluence, that is where it ends its journey. This stream of bliss has its source in the story that tells all about *Śiva*'s divine sport. A river sweeps away all dirt as it courses along.

Similarly, this river of bliss originating from devotion to *Śiva* wipes away the impurities caused by our sins. Apart from being a purifier, does not a river bring relief from heat, provide cool water for people to drink, to bathe and irrigate their crops? In the same way, the *Śivānanda* river, apart from doing away with our sins, destroys our pain - not of the throat or stomach but of our worldly existence. Then it divides itself into distributaries and forms into a delta consisting of all those branches of external knowledge perceived by the intelligence and empties itself into the lake that is the Lord's will or consciousness.

A river has to empty itself, find its destination, somewhere. Most rivers empty themselves in the ocean but some find their destination in lakes. After it falls into the sea a river cannot be harnessed for irrigation nor can its water be drawn for drinking. But rivers that fall into lakes are always useful. The flood of *Śivānanda* that has taken the form of ślokas composed by the *Āchāryā*, is it not useful to the world for all time? If he were to answer expressly, 'It is so', it would be mistaken for arrogance. So he says in a veiled manner, 'The *Śivānanda* river has collected

itself in the lake of my consciousness.' The river of *līlānanda* arising from the story of *Śiva* empties itself into the consciousness of the devotee and, collecting itself there, becomes tranquil spiritual bliss.

The term '*Saundaryalaharī*' occurs in the third of the stanzas describing *Ambālī*'s beautiful form, from her head of hair to her feet—it is the 44th stanza of the hymn taken as a whole. The *Śrīchakra* consists of 43 triangles. There is a view that the Bindu at the centre is also a triangle, thus making the total number of triangles in the *Śrīchakra* 44. The *Saundaryalaharī* itself mentions 44 triangles (third line, 11th stanza). The *Śrīchakra* is not only the home, the residence, of *Ambālī*: it is indeed her form as a diagram (*yanthra-svarūpam*). With the 41st stanza the *Āchāryā* concludes the portion dealing with yanthra, manthra and thanthra. Even though he depicts *Ambālī*'s physical form in a manner that all people can take delight in without difficulty, he gives us a hint of his interest in, and devotion to, *Śāsthṛā* also by describing her yanthra form in the 44th stanza in which he uses the term '*Saundaryalaharī*' to indicate the flood of beauty that *Ambālī*'s physical form is.

To one of his *sathakams* the *Āchāryā* gives the name of '*Sivāandalaharī*' which yields the meaning, 'the stream of joy associated with *Śiva*'. The name '*Śiva*' is expressly mentioned here. But in the second *sathakam* no such prefix has been used to denote that the hymn is about *Ambālī*. The title is merely '*Saundaryalaharī*' which means a flood of beauty. *Ambāshtakam*, *Ambālī-Pancharatnam*, *Dēvi-bhujangam*, *Dēvi-chathushshashtyupachāra-pūja-sthōthrm* are some of the *Āchāryā*'s other hymns. The title of this *sathakam* on the goddess is not similar; it is not '*Ambālī Saundaryalaharī*' or '*Dēvi-Saundaryalaharī*'.

The fact is *saundaryam* itself means *Ambālī*. When we squeeze limes, oranges and apples we get lime-juice, orange-juice

and apple-juice. But we also add to them jaggery or another form of it, sugar. When we refer to the beauty of other gods or goddesses we have to specifically mention their names (that is the name of the god or goddess concerned must be used as a prefix before the word meaning beauty). But the source of their beauty is *Ambāl*; the material or 'commodity' out of which their beauty has been made is *Ambāl* - *Ambāl* is the root of all beauty.

That which makes all beautiful things beautiful, all beautiful objects beautiful, that which is the be-all and end-all of everything that is beautiful is the beauty of *Ambāl*. The beauty of *Ambāl* alone is true beauty. So, while speaking of *Ambāl*'s beauty, we do not have to specifically use the word '*Ambāl*'s' before 'beauty'.

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A TITLE WITH UNIVERSAL APPEAL

Another point occurs to me. If we were to include '*Ambāl*' in the title, it would mean that the work is of interest to followers of our religion alone. People belonging to other faiths, as well as atheists, would have no interest in it. If the title were merely 'Beauty' - 'Flood of Beauty', '*Saundaryalahari*' - it would arouse universal interest, Beauty has a universal appeal. The natural beauty of Kashmir enchants the American as much as it does the Englishman. Affluent people from our country go to enjoy the scenic beauty of Switzerland. It is not only Nature that attracts. All people flock to see man-made objects of beauty like sculptures. Even more than noble qualities like love and sacrifice, it is outward beauty that attracts all people. Even those who are opposed to one another, get attracted by the same.

Once they start reading the book they will become engrossed in it as they find in it a female of surpassing beauty depicted by a gifted poet. Like a sugar-coated pill, if a book has hidden in it the medicine to nurture the *Āthmā* (Self) -- though outwardly or

superficially it describes beauty - those who read it for its passages on beauty will, without realising it themselves, become involved in [higher matters like] devotion to *Ambāl*. Even those who do not respond to the name of *Ambāl* will become devoted to her after being drawn to her by the portrayal of her beauty. And those who read it, appreciating it as a poetic work, will eventually start reading it with devotion. Perhaps the *Āchāryā* must have thought that keeping the name of *Ambāl* hidden and having only 'Beauty' as part of the title was the right way to draw all people towards *Ambāl* rather than aim at the small circle of known devotees of *Dēvi*.

Beauty itself is that which pertains to *Ambāl*. Because the name 'Sundari' itself denotes her (it means the Beautiful One). Though there are longer forms of the name like 'Thripurasundari' and '*Mahāthripurasundari*', she is basically Sundari. It is like *Śiva* being also known as '*Paramaśiva*', '*Sadāśivā*' and '*Sāmbaśiva*'. That which denotes a 'sundari' is 'saundaryam'. The subject of the *Saundaryalaharī*, *Mahā-Thripurasundari*, is one of the many forms of *Ambāl*. The presiding deity of the *Śrīvidhyā manthra-thanthra*, of *Śrīyanthra* (*Śrīchakra*), etc, is Thripurasundari.

Is not *Ambāl* also known as *Pārvathi*, *Durgā*, *Kālī*, *Bālā*, *Bhuvanēsvari* and so on? Some of these forms of *Dēvi* are beautiful, some are fearful and some combine the qualities of both. Ten names of the deity are mentioned as the graces of *Dēvi*--*Daśa-Mahā-Vidhyā*. The *Sāsthṛā* relating to *Mahā-Thripurasundari*, that is *Rājarājeśvari*, is spoken of as '*Sundari Vidhyā*'. Among all forms of *Ambāl* she is the most gentle, the most beautiful : hence her name 'Sundari.'

'I have had the vision of so many deities. But I have not seen anywhere a beautiful form like that of Thripurasundari, ' these are words spoken by the Paramahansa (*Sri Ramakrishṇa*)

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NAMES OF AMBĀL : NOT MANY USED IN THE HYMN

There is something about the hymn that might cause you surprise. It is not in the title of the hymn alone that the name of Thripurasundari does not figure: throughout the text also it does not. Not in a single stanza out of the one hundred do we find Thripurasundari, or any Sundari for that matter, mentioned even once. There are a number of synonyms even for this form of *Ambāl*. Similarly, Nataraja, one of the manifestations of *Śiva*, has synonyms like *Sabhāpathi*, *Chidambaranātha*, *Chithsabhēsa*, *Tandavarāya*. Thripurasundari is also called *Lalithāmbāl*, *Rajarājēsvari*, *Kāmākshi*, *Kāmēsvari* and so on. But none of these names occurs in any stanza.

Let us next take the *Śivānandalahari*. In this composition, you see one or another of the names that are specifically used for *Īśvarā* like *Śiva*, *Paramaśiva*, *Sadāśivā*, *Śambhu*, *Śankarā*, *Paśupathi*, *Māhādevā*, *Girīsā* and *Sāmba*. If any such name is not used in any one of the stanzas - as if to compensate for this - two or three are used in a succeeding stanza. The name the *Āchāryā* uses most frequently is that of *Śambhu*. In a number of stanzas he addresses *Śiva* as 'Śambho'. Next to *Śambhu*, the names most often used are *Paśupathi*, *Śiva*. Then, here and there, we find names like 'Swāmi' and 'Vibhu' which are not specific to *Śiva* but are applicable to any god.

None of the names that particularly denote the presiding deity of Sundari vidhya is mentioned in it. Also only very few of the names of the other forms of *Ambāl* are used in the hymn. Among them the most frequently seen are those of *Girisutā* and *Himagirisutā*. Names like *Śivā*, *Bhavāni*, *Umā*, *Sathi*, *Pārvathi* and *Chandi* occur in one or two places. We come across names such as *Janani*, *Māthā*, *Ambāl* and *Dēvi* which names can be used to denote any female deity and are not appellations specially signifying *Parāśakthi* inseparably united with *Paramēśvarā*. In many stanzas

we do not find names belonging to either category, names specially denoting *Parāśakthi* or those that are common to all goddesses.

If *nāma rasa* is predominant, it will be at the expense of *kavitā rasa*. It must have been *Ambāl*'s resolve that the hymn must be permeated with *kavitā rasa*. That is why not much importance is given to the different names of *Parāśakthi* or *Ambāl*.

The very first of the 100 stanzas opens with the words, 'Śivah Śakthyā'. Here we have the extremely significant name of 'Śakthi' to denote *Ambāl*. Like *Śaivism* and *Vaiṣṇavism*, so *Śāktham*, which means pertaining to *Śakthi*. *Ambāl* is the power or energy of the Brahman. *Śakthi* conveys the full meaning of the name *Ambāl*. This name (*Śakthi*) occurring in the very first stanza of the hymn is not repeated again.

There are three stages in the life of a woman and these are characterised by three important relationships. At first she is the daughter of her parents; then she is the wife of her husband; and, finally, she is the mother of her children. Although our hymn mentions very few names of *Ambāl*, it does refer to names of hers that are appropriate to the three stages mentioned above. That it speaks of her as the wife of *Paramēśvarā* and as the mother of all of us (all mankind, all beings) is not particularly noteworthy; such references are plentiful in any work devoted to the goddess and written in any language. Among the many uncommon or novel features of the *Saundaryalaharī* (as a hymn to *Ambāl*) is the fact that it has more names conveying the idea of her being a daughter than of her being a wife or mother.

She is called *Girisutā* because she is the daughter of the *Parvatarājā* (King of Mountains). Names like *Himagirisutā*, *Śailatanayā*, *Dharaṇīdharakanyā*, *Pārvathi* also occur. As one who symbolises the triumphant flag of the clan of mountains she is called 'Nagapati-patākā', *Duhinagiri-vamśadhavajapati*, etc. The mother of all worlds is indeed the mother of *Himavān* also and she

becomes his daughter. It was in remembrance of this wonderful phenomenon, in the thought of turning mother into daughter, that the *Āchāryā* has included more names of *Ambāl* denoting her position as daughter. There are many ways in which we regard God and worship him. Becoming a child ourselves and looking upon the Lord as Mother or Father is what is called the '*apathya bhāva*'. *Jnānasambandhar* has sung the praises of the Lord from such an angle. The second is the attitude called '*vātsalya bhāva*'. According to this we become mother or father and look upon God as our child, fondle him and dote on him as our child. *Thripurasundari* is not the Child *Ambāl*. When she appeared from the sacrificial fire, from the fire of *jnāna*, she was youthful and of marriageable age. The Child *Ambāl* is called *Bālā*. In the text of the hymn *Ambāl* is extolled as wife (consort of *Śiva*), as Mother, as *Mahāśakthi* and so on. Even so, whenever her names are mentioned—and it is often – the *Āchāryā* uses terms suggesting the idea of her being a daughter. It seems he does so in order not to overlook the *vātsalya bhava* in adoring her. The latter part of the *Saundaryalaharī* which many people believe was composed by the *Āchāryā* himself is a *kesādhi-pādānta* description of *Ambāl*. In this, in the very first stanza, the *Āchāryā* addresses her as 'Himagirisute!' ('O Daughter of *Himavān*' or 'Daughter of the Mountain of Snow'). In the next stanza he refers to her as the consort of *Śiva*, '*Chikura-nikurumbam thava Śivē*'. In the concluding stanza of the work he addresses her as 'Janani' (Mother) and says: 'This hymn which is made up of your own words I offer to you' ('*Thvadhīyā-bhirvāgbhistava Janani vāchām sthuthiriyam*'). The *Āchāryā* refers to her at first as daughter, then as wife and finally as Mother.

In her form of Mother, the *Āchāryā* calls her '*Ambāl*' and '*Māthā*' in a few places, but otherwise the term he most frequently employs to denote her motherhood is 'Janani'. Everything is born of her, all human beings are her children: it must be to make a deep

impression of this idea on our minds that he uses the name 'Janani' frequently.

In the last line of the concluding stanza of the first part of the hymn known as '*Ānandalahari*', *Īśvarā* and *Ambāl* are jointly referred to as '*Janaka-Janani*'. This phrase has more significance than '*Māthā-Pithā*'. '*Māthā*' and '*Pithā*' have different roots, so they differ in their meanings also. '*Māthā*' means 'one who keeps (things) concealed within her'; while '*Pithā*' means one who protects. '*Janaka*' and '*janani*', on the other hand, are derived from the same root, that is 'jan', to give birth to (to procreate).

I have been saying that the names of *Ambāl* appear only a few times in the hymn. This seems to proclaim that we must treat divine names with respect and devotion. They are not to be thrown about freely like pearls that are scattered lavishly or carelessly. Think of a gem that is flashed for a moment before you and then withdrawn to be tucked away securely. You must regard similarly the gem that is the divine name, recognizing its priceless nature. You must use it sparingly and guard it with great care. Does a woman mention her husband's name or a pupil his guru's? It is the same (with the names of *Dēvi*). But, then, is she not Mother? Don't we have a right over her? Don't we take liberties with her? But however much we love this Mother and however much we feel free before her, we must not be wanting in respect for her. This Mother is not only the embodiment of love and affection; she is *Rajarājesvari*, the omnipotent one who subjugates all the worlds and rules over them. In her 'One Thousand Names', coming immediately after '*Śrīmāthā*' are the names '*Śrīmaharājni*' and '*Simhāsanēsvari*' indicating the authority wielded by her. It seems that not many of her names have been mentioned in order not to detract from the royal honour to be accorded her. We refer to the name of a queen only when we feel it is absolutely necessary, but otherwise we refer to her as 'Her Majesty'.

ON 'ĀNANDALAHARI'

The title of the first part of the hymn has no prefix to indicate that it is devoted to *Ambāl*. It is merely 'Ānandalahari'. Here too we may mention the reasons given earlier. Just as 'saundaryam' means *Ambāl*, 'Ānanda' too is to be identified with her. Just as she is the source of many types of 'saundarya' or beauty, she is also the matrix of many types of *ānanda* or bliss. After all, is not the Mother herself the matrix? The *Thaithīrīya* and *Brhūdāraṇyaka Upanishads* refer to many gradations of *ānandā* in an ascending order. We too speak of many kinds of *ānandā*: *Prēmānandā*, *Ātmānandā* [the *Mahāśwāmi* continues chuckling to himself] coffee-*ānandā*, cinema-*ānandā*, cricket-*ānandā*, and the *ānandā* that contains all these varieties of *ānandā*, i.e. indriyananda. Then we have *srōtrānandā* and *nētrānandā*, the joy of listening and seeing. So to distinguish the ananda from all these types in the hymn of 100 stanzas to *Paramēśvarā*, *Śivananda* had to be specifically mentioned.

But when we merely say 'Ānandā' it means the bliss of *Ambāl*. What [or who] is *Ambāl*? The 'chith' of *Paramēśvarā* who is 'sath'. To explain, all experience of *ānandā* is derived from knowledge. *Ambāl* is this power of chith that is *ānandā*. *Ānandā* is the experience that 'sath' knows itself through 'chith'. The many types of joy that we experience are from the reflection of this 'chith'. The ultimate point of such experience is the non-dualistic bliss we experience by our being dissolved in this chith and becoming the very form of *jnāna*.

Ambāl is rooted in this *jnāna*. In the *Sahasraṇāmam* it is mentioned that the bliss known to Brahma and others is but a drop of the bliss of *Ambāl*- '*Svātmānandalavībhūta-Brahmādyānanda-santatiḥ*'. That is why the first part of this work which is devoted to *Ambāl* is merely called 'Ānandalahari' without her name being added. There is also another hymn by the *Āchāryā* devoted to

Ambāl and it is also called '*Ānandalahari*'. In this also the name of *Ambāl* does not figure in the title. In the first part of the *Saundaryalaharī* (eighth stanza) the term '*Chidānandalaharīm*' occurs suggesting the utter bliss flowing from *Ambāl* as the embodiment of 'chith'. If we say only '*ānandā*', without mentioning 'chith', it would mean we are speaking about *Ambāl*. That is the reason why the first part of the *Saundaryalaharī* is called merely '*Ānandalahari*'.

It is said that to remain in a steady state forgetting oneself is to experience the bliss of the Brahman. That is 'sath'. If, in a sense, it is a condition in which one remains forgetting oneself, in another sense, it is a state in which one is fully aware of oneself. It is a state in which, steeped in *Śivam*, we are oblivious of ourselves - of what we are in this life of ours with our body and senses - and realize ourselves, that is become aware of the true entity that we are, the entity that is the source of all. In this state the one who knows, the experience of knowing and the knowledge are not three separate factors, but constitute one whole which is the bliss of perceiving all three as one.

If the quiescent 'sath' which by itself is *Śivam*, *Ambāl* is the 'chith' that knows and that experiences bliss. If 'sath' does not know itself and does not experience itself, is it not like one that is dead? It is when it is not so that the Brahman that is 'sath' comes to have *Śakthi*. To know oneself, because of this *Śakthi*, as the One and only Reality and experience the bliss thereof is one state of 'sath'. There is another state in which, through the *Māyā* of *Śakthi*, it creates the many worlds and the living beings as though these were external to itself and conducts them. From knowing oneself inwardly, to create the many worlds and all the living creatures as if they were outside of itself and supporting them - all this is the doing of 'sath'.

Śivam is nothing but 'sath' and when it becomes the embodied *Śiva* it does many things in sport—all this is the manifestation of the *Śakthi* that is in him. When the *Āchāryā* speaks in the *Saundaryalaharī* of the joy derived from the story told of *Śiva* being the cause of *Śivananda*, it means that *Sivam* becomes *Śiva* and that the stories attributed to him are the doing of *Ambāl*. Since the empirical world is entirely hers, *Śiva*, *Vishṇu* and other deities are her making. So too unwise mortals like us, insects and other creatures, indeed, whatever exist in whatever form and whatever they do, all these come under the province of *Ambāl*, all these are her making. This is what the very first stanza of the *Saundaryalaharī* expresses. So we arrive at the conclusion that if the story of *Śiva* in *Śivānandalahari* is a stream of bliss it is the work of *Ambāl* herself. Its greatness also belongs to her. Instead of becoming solid like a rock, *Śivānandā* rises as a stream: this too is her work.

Ambāl is a lahari, a stream or a flood with regard to everything. She who is *Saundaryalaharī* and *Ānandalahari* is also mentioned as *Śrungāralahari* (Stanza 16) and *Āhlādahari* (Stanza 21), a wave of love and a wave of gladness.

It is *Ambāl* who creates the desire in the *Parabrahmam* to conduct the affairs of the world and to bring freedom for people from worldly existence. Her being united with him is what is called the dhāmpathya of *Paramēśvarā* and *Kāmēśvari* [*Ambāl* as *Kāmēśvari* and *Paramēśvarā* forming a couple.] *Kāmēśvari* is the same as Lalitha-Thripurasundari, the presiding deity of *Śrīvidhyā*. Since she inspires *kāma* or desire in *Īśvarā* she becomes '*Śrungāralahari*'. Does not the creative imagination of poets come about in the same manner as the ability of *Īśvarā* to perform the function of creation? The *Āchāryā* uses the term '*Śrungāralahari*' in this hymn while speaking about the stream of *Śrungāra-rasa* (the erotic mood or flavour) emanating from those blessed with the poetic gift.

'*Āhlādalahari*' is the same as '*ānandalahari*'. According to the *Kundalini yōga*, those who are freed from mala-māyā (the impurities of worldly existence) on seeing *Ambāl*'s '*kalā*' (degree of *Ambāl*'s beauty) are immersed in the flood of supreme bliss. It is in this context that the *Āchāryā* uses the term '*paramāhlādalahari*'.

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APPRECIATING BEAUTY IS ITS OWN REWARD

In the *Śivānandalahari* it is said that the flood of *Śivānandā* rises from the activities of *Śiva*, that it washes away the impurity of sin, appeases the torment of worldly existence and that it fills the lake of our heart. But in the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 44) in which the term '*Saundaryalaharī*' occurs nothing similar is spoken (about what beauty or the flood of beauty does). In it the *Āchāryā* does no more than mention that the parting of the hair on *Ambāl*'s head serves as a channel for the beauty flowing from her face. When describing beauty with poetic flavour and imagination there is no need to go into explanations or clarifications of anything. Nor is there any need to resort to a philosophical discussion or to allegories. The *Āchāryā*, in composing his hymn, seems to suggest that those who have the capacity to recognize beauty and take delight in it will do so for no purpose other than that of deriving aesthetic pleasure from it.

The flood of *Ambāl*'s beauty, it must be said, washes away our sins and is a remedy for our torments and fevers; it fills the lake of our heart. But it is not necessary to mention all the good it does in order to exalt it. It is such that it is 'self-exalted'. When you take a dip in the Ganga you are at once freed from your sins, sorrows and fevers. But, having had your bath, do you feel like reaching for the shore at once? You feel like remaining immersed in it for long or you like to keep swimming in it as long as you like.

It is not that you bathe in it for your sins to be washed away or for your troubles to be dissolved. There is the joy of just bathing in the river. The *Āchāryā* shows that the same is the case with our being immersed in the flow of *Ambālī*'s beauty and experiencing the joy of remaining plunged in it.

In the *Śivānandalahari* the *Āchāryā* says that the flood of *Śivānandā* rises from the activities of *Īśvarā*. In this hymn, although he speaks of '*vadana-Saundaryalaharī*', that is *Ambālī*'s beauty welling up from her face, her beauty is not confined to her face. She is a flow of beauty from head to foot. In the stanza (12) beginning with the words '*thvadhīyam saundaryam*', her entire beauty is depicted. Just as *Ānandalahari* rises from the sport (*līlā*) of *Śiva*, from the functions performed by him, *Saundaryalaharī* flows from *Ambālī*'s person. *Īśvarā* who has many exploits to his credit, has many functions to perform, many roles to play (for *Śivānandā* to well up and flow); but *Ambālī* has nothing to do; she is by herself a flood of beauty.

In the *Śivānandalahari*, *Īśvarā*'s sport is described as manifested in various ways. It is different in the *Saundaryalaharī*, in which none of the stories relating to *Ambālī*, like the one about the slaying of *Bhandāsura* is told. In it only her physical form is portrayed and this itself the *Āchāryā* shows to be a source of great bliss. There is no description of *Īśvarā* in the *Śivānandalahari*, part by part, as there is of *Ambālī* in the *Saundaryalaharī*. The 'techniques' adopted by the *Āchāryā* in the two poems are different.

In portraying the body, there is one order for male deities and another for female deities. The former have to be depicted from the feet to the head. This is known by various names: '*pādādhi-keśāntam*' (from the feet to the hair on the head), '*āpādamastakam*' (from the feet to the head), '*nakha-sikha-paryantam*' (from the toe nails to the hair on the head). The

reverse order is observed for female deities : from the tresses of hair, the poet goes on to portray the forehead, the eyes and so on down to the feet. This is '*kēsādhī-padantam*'. This order is adopted in the first part of the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*

In the *Śivānandalahari* there is no description of the physical form of *Śiva*. But its author, the *Āchāryā*, has himself composed an independent hymn to *Śiva* in which there is a *pādādhī-kēsānta* portrait of the Lord. Not satisfied with this, he has, besides, written another poem in which he has given us a *kēsādhī-pādānta* description also of *Īśvarā*. After all, *Śiva* is half of Mother, so he must have thought it justified to do another hymn to him in which he has adopted the order in which female deities are to be portrayed.

In the *Saundaryalaharī Ambālī* is not mentioned as merely half of *Īśvarā*'s body. She is indeed his entire body as we notice from the words, '*sarīram thvam sambhōh*' (Stanza 34). When we see that the *Śivam* that has no form and has no function to perform becomes *Śiva* through the greatness of *Śakthi*, we realise that she indeed is the cause not only of his body but of all his doings. In the 'Lahari' relating to *Śiva*, the *Āchāryā* describes the enchanting story of his sport and in the 'Lahari' relating to *Ambālī* he depicts the beauty of her body : thus he makes the flavour or *rasa* of joy flow in two different ways.

We become immersed in bliss when the picture of *Ambālī*'s beauty is impressed within us. There is nothing in this context for us to think about or discuss as it would be the case if we were to come across stories or other accounts relating to a deity. When there is an object of the utmost grace and beauty we keep on looking at it and derive a sense of fullness from it. In this there is no effort on our part; all we do is to gaze at the beautiful object and derive the utmost bliss.

There are two extremely easy ways of grasping the Lord: chanting his names repeatedly and meditating on his form. These two are together called '*nāma-rūpa*'. To keep muttering the names of the Lord does not involve any effort. The second easy way is to have *dharṣan* of an auspicious image of a deity with our outward eye (physical eye) or with our mind's eye. Great men see before their physical eye divine forms as a living reality. We are able to see with our outward eye only deities carved in stone, that is idols and so on. It is only with our mind's eye that we can picture to ourselves deities as living realities moving about in our midst. Even an idol is a living entity since life is instilled into it at the time of its installation. *Vaiṣṇavas* exalt such an idol calling it an '*arcchāvatārā*'. So by going to the temple and having *dharṣan* of the deity in it we become enchanted by the idol and without any effort on our part keep thinking of the Lord.

Much has been said about the glory of the names of the Lord. But in our present immature state we cannot become easily devoted to God by merely chanting his names. We need to link the name to a form, keep the mind drawn towards it and fixed in devotion. When we chant '*Rama, Rama*', we automatically think of Rama in his emerald-green form, bearing the bow called *Kodanda*. For ordinary people to repeat the names of a deity without linking it to a form is a matter of extreme drabness.

When one is performing japa in the prescribed manner one is advised to recite the *dhyana-sloka* pertaining to the deity concerned so that its form will be fixed in one's mind.

(As a way of devotion) chanting repeatedly the names of the Lord seems more difficult than contemplating or seeing his form. To think of a beautiful divine form is easier and more joyous than all other means of devotion.

That is why in this Lahari (in this hymn) there is no reference to its origin (the source of the Lahari), the course it takes and the

place where it empties itself. Suppose you have a high-quality mango, what gives you joy is the eating of it. Do you worry about how or where it grew, where or how it ripened, what it will do when you take it in?

We have obtained the *Saundaryalaharī* as a *rasālu* mango soaked in the divine ambrosia. This hymn which describes the beauty of *Ambāl* has itself come to be her form (her embodiment in verse). The subject that is praised, the one who praises and the praise (that is the hymn) are all one. When one reads the hymn, steeping oneself deeper and deeper in it, one becomes that which one reads. One becomes *Ambāl* herself and obtains liberation, the state in which one is oneself and one is all.

* * *

WHAT IS BEAUTY?

You may think that what I have said is exaggeration. It is true that when you see a beautiful object you feel delighted for a moment. 'But how could you say,' you may ask, 'that we would be rewarded with fullness when we see *Ambāl*'s cascading beauty? How could you say that by being steeped in it we would attain *Adhvaithānandā*, the *mōksha* that is the bliss of becoming one with the Brahman? We look at a lotus or the full moon and we are happy. But will such happiness result in the great bliss called *mōksha*?'

We see that poets who have aesthetic experience of a pellucid nature discern God in beauty and even know the bliss of being aware of the Brahman. From their descriptions of Nature itself we can infer that through the contemplation of Nature itself they experience unalloyed beatitude.

What exactly is the aesthetic experience of poetry? It is the joy derived from appreciating beauty. Rhetoricians, authors of works on poetics like Abhinavagupta and Jagannātha Pandita, avow

that such an experience of poetic beauty may afford us *Brahmānandā* that is momentary if not everlasting. Abhinavagupta says so on the basis of Kashmiri *Śaivism* which is close to Adhvaita. As for Jagannātha Pandita, he speaks of the aesthetic experience of poetic beauty leading to *Brahmānanda* on the basis of Advaita itself.

What is poetry? Does it not mean Nature and man depicted in a beautiful manner, taking into account all the characteristics of Nature and all the natural qualities of man? In our day-to-day life we keep observing both. And though our life is a whirl in the midst of Nature and men we do not see anything in them that gives us delight. But when we see them or have experience of them (Nature and the natural qualities of fellow humans) portrayed in poetry or drama don't we realize that they appeal to our aesthetic sensibilities? What is the reason for this? Is it not because they, Nature and man, are presented in a manner that arouses our sense of beauty? So the experience gained from poetry is the experience gained from beauty. Great writers of *alankāra Śāstrā* have shown that such an experience of beauty can lead us to liberation.

In European countries too there have been Nature poets who, steeped in the beauty of Nature, have found the Godhead in it. In our own country Rabindranath Tagore has expressed the view that to experience beauty is to come face to face with God. When we say '*sath-chith-ānanda*' (existence-consciousness-bliss), it means that *jñāna* and *ānandā* are indissolubly united with '*sathh*' or truth. Similarly, the good and the beautiful are also inseparably connected with truth. This is part of the creed of the *Brahmō Samaj* which had the support of Tagore. It is in pursuance of this idea that the *Brahmō Samaj* speaks of '*Sathyam-Śivam Sundaram*', which is similar to *sath-chith-ānandā*. '*Śivam*' means good. Everybody knows that '*sundaram*' means beautiful. The underlying idea is that beauty is part of the concept of the

Parabrahmam. It also means that appreciating beauty fully and in the right manner is to experience *Brahmānandā*.

However, many of us do not seem to know what exactly is meant by 'the right manner' of appreciating beauty. We do not know how to give over our mind entirely to experiencing beauty. Also most of us are not mature enough to perceive the Godhead in beauty. Our appreciation of beauty and the happiness we derive from it are momentary. Most of us are unable to devote ourselves to beauty and to regard it as a means of release from worldly existence.

What is it that appears beautiful to us? That which gives us joy, happiness, we call beautiful. If we feel the urge to look at an object again and again it means it is beautiful. Here I must add an important qualifying clause. The joy that we experience must not be such as to disturb our mind or make us emotionally unbalanced. When we see an object it must fill our minds with delight that is pure and serene; only then can it be called beautiful. If a man evinces a great liking for scenes of cruelty or for obscene erotic gestures and feels happy about the same, they cannot for that reason be called beautiful. It is important that the person who experiences beauty is in a good state of mind.

There is one more point to be considered. The object that looks enchanting must not cause us fear, sorrow or anger. Suppose there is a vast lush green valley surrounded by mountains. Or imagine there is a river that tumbles down from a great height. We can appreciate their beauty only from a safe distance. If we go to the edge of the valley to have a better view of it we will be afraid of slipping and falling down. If we go close to the waterfall there is the risk of our being swept away by it. In either case we will be in no mood to appreciate its beauty.

A serpent looks so smooth and shiny as if an accomplished artist has applied colour to it and drawn stripes on it - and see how

beautifully it glides, twisting and turning its body glistening in the sun. But are we in a mood to stand and gaze at it and admire its beauty? No, we flee from it in terror. Or take the example of a tiger or a cheetah. If we see them roaming freely in the open instead of being shut up in a cage we will be gripped by fear. Only a wise sage who has perfected himself, a siddha can happily approach a snake and sing to it, 'Dance, O! snake, dance.' Only a great poet can find delight in writing a poem, inspired by the beauty of a tiger. We become aware of the beauty of an object only when it does not create fear in us and when we feel we are not endangered by it. Take the case of a lotus or the full moon. We appreciate the colour, the tenderness and fragrance of the former and the coolness of the latter. However much jasmines look pretty do we appreciate them if we see a snake hanging from the *pandal* on which the jasmine creeper winds itself?

Now about human beings. We appreciate the looks of a person only if there is love as well as affection in him. Or take the example of a man of wealth and influence. He may have good looks but we would not like him if he shouts at us angrily for nothing or threatens to victimise us for no reason.

Unlike in the case of inanimate objects like flowers, cloudscapes at dawn or dusk, we can fully appreciate the looks of living creatures, whether human beings, animals, or birds, only when they interact with us in an affectionate manner. Perhaps they need not even be affectionate. For instance, we may appreciate the good looks of human beings to some extent if they do not arouse in us fear or sorrow or they do not have ill feelings towards us. But if their good looks are combined with love how much more do we like them.

We keep looking again and again at people who are the picture of love whether they are handsome or not. This leads us to the conclusion that it is love that is transformed into beauty. Let a mother be utterly dark in complexion and let her be ungainly. But

her child keeps clinging to her and refuses to go to anybody else. If a neighbour tries to take it in her arms and fondle it, it turns away in fear from her, good-looking though she is, and goes and hugs its mother.

What is the reason for this? The child knows its mother, how much she loves it. Ashtavakra (as his very name suggests) had eight bodily distortions. But he was much sought after by the learned. Then there are so many great men, realised souls, accomplished men (i.e. siddhas) who are unattractive to look at or who may appear even fearsome or dull witted. But people flock to them, besiege them, to have a glimpse of them. In fact, they look at them again and again. Indeed they do not take their eyes off them. Why do they do so? It is the compassion of the great men, their inner grace, their power to bless that draw people to them. They must be said to be beautiful according to the definition, 'Beauty is that which we gaze at, turning back to see it again and again.' There is a saying. 'The beauty within one is visible on outside on one's face. In the same way, speaking about the great men referred to above, their inner compassion, the compassion in their hearts, triumphs over their unpleasing physical appearance and gives them a rich veneer of handsomeness.

In sum, the beauty of a living being grows as the love evinced by the same increases. When this love reaches an exalted stage the beauty of form (or of the body) ceases to have any meaning and now love itself is revealed as beauty.

If we have the urge to look at an object again and again it is because of the delight we derive from doing so. Foremost in the matter of making us happy is love. And there is no joy equal to that derived from love. So the love that bestows joy by itself becomes beauty. We desire to keep on gazing again and again at the man who is beautiful because of his loving nature.

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AMBĀL : BEAUTY THAT IS FULL, LOVE THAT IS TOTAL

What is *Ambāl* like? If she is the embodiment of beauty, she is also the embodiment of love. She is indeed love that is beauty. Sugar imparts sweetness to any dish. Similarly, whatever beautiful objects you see and wherever you see them, the basic ingredient of all that beauty is derived from *Ambāl*: she is indeed the matrix of all beauty. She is *Śakthi*, the power of the Brahman, and hers is beauty that is full and entire. Droplets of it are sprinkled on all other forms and objects of beauty. '*Ambāl* is the fountain of all beauty and all beautiful things are beautiful because they are tinged with her beauty.

It is *Ambāl*'s inner being of grace that has taken the form of beauty flowing in a flood.

Love is formless and an abstract concept. We see in this world people who are affectionate but outwardly unpleasing in appearance. In the same way there are people lacking in affection but outwardly good to look at. However, where there is love it triumphs over physical features to give the person concerned the glow of beauty. It means that love that has no form is somehow reflected in the form of the person referred to. As for *Ambāl*, love is not merely reflected in her form, she is the very form of love, love that has become the parts of her body. Love that has no form becomes the beauty of her form. In her the fullness of love is transformed into the fullness of beauty.

Is it not because, children (that is mankind) cannot comprehend it that *Śakthi*, the Power of the formless *Parabrahman*, has taken the form of *Ambāl*? Since she has assumed this form out of her love and compassion, is it not the embodiment of love itself? The purpose of *Ambāl* assuming her supremely lovely body is to make all people, including the unintelligent and the immature, to give up their attachment to beauty in all its petty and tawdry forms and to turn to her. Her

great charm is nothing but the outcome of her compassion. She is in fact the embodiment of the beauty that is her compassion. In the case of human beings there is no connection between their inner feelings of love and their outward looks. Not so in the case of Ambika. Her inner love is her outward bodily beauty. This is particularly true of her form of Thripurasundari, the presiding deity of *Śrividhyā*. The name has a philosophical import.

There are a number of words that go to show that beauty and love are one and the same. The qualifying word 'su' (used as a prefix) has two meanings: that which is good and that which is beautiful. '*Sugūna*' is 'good quality' ; '*surūpa*' is 'beautiful form or body'. What exactly is 'good', a word we often use? Love is something that is extremely good. We say '*(Love it is that is Śivam)*'. '*Śivam*' and '*subham*' mean the same. '*Śubham*' means "good". Among all those that are good what must be regarded as the highest? Is it not love? So '*subham*' means love. The word '*Śobhā*' is derived from '*subha*'. We use the word '*subha*' with '*śobhanam*' : for instance, '*subha śobhanam*'. '*Śobha*' means beauty. When we speak of '*śobhā*' as being derived from '*subha*' it means the same as saying that beauty is derived from love. Among *subha* or auspicious functions we refer chiefly to '*kalyāṇam*' [this word is popularly used in the South for marriage]. In the marriage invitation card we have the term '*subha muhūrta patrikā*'. Among the many meanings of '*kalyāṇa*' one is 'that which is good', which means 'love'. Another meaning is 'beauty'. The term '*Śivam-Sundaram*' must have come to be used in this manner. '*Śivam*' is '*Sundarēśvarā*': he is the god whose inner love assumes his beautiful form.

Since *Ambālī* is love manifested as beauty, to be steeped in the flood of her beauty is to be dissolved in love. It takes one to the non-dualistic state of her inner being and to *Ātmānandā*, the bliss of the Self. If there is beauty independent of love it means no more than transient joy. If love itself becomes beauty? What better

means there can be for everlasting bliss than the compassion of *Parāśakthi* or her grace? It is because we experience that love itself as beauty that it becomes the means of our final emancipation.

After being melted in this love (the love of *Parāśakthi*) and dissolved in it we can ourselves become It, become She, become one without a second (*Adhvaita*). This state of inseparable union is referred to in the stanzas beginning with the words '*Bhavānithvam*' (Stanza 22) and '*Sarasvathyā Lakshmyā*' (Stanza 99).

So it is no exaggeration to say that one can achieve liberation through beauty, through divine beauty.

How do we picture *Ambāl* to ourselves, imagine her form? Is her complexion green, red or dark? All these different colours are ascribed to her in her different forms. Brahma has four heads, *Śiva* five, *Subrahmanya* six. How many heads does *Ambāl* have? According to the *Vēdhas*, the *visvarūpa* or *virātarūpa* (the cosmic form of the Lord) has a thousand heads ('*sahasraśīrsham*'). But we cannot comprehend such a form, or perceive it with our physical eye. *Ambāl* has many forms, from *Mīnākshi* with two hands to *Mahishāsuramardini* with eighteen. It is all how the sages, each of them, have had their vision of her. So how do we visualise her, with how many hands? In one of her aspects she is with matted and dishevelled hair; in another she wears a crown; and in a third she is bejewelled all over. She is also represented wearing no clothes at all, blood smeared on her body and wearing a garland of skulls. Considering all such different images how do we picture to ourselves *Ambāl*'s form?

What is the answer to this question? 'Whatever her form or aspect, love is her most important characteristic. So think of her as the embodiment of love.'

'If there is somewhere a good soul who feeds people with all his heart, without expecting any reward, go and see him, see his

face. Note how the donor is happier than the donee. When you see such a scene, does not your own heart melt a little? Are you not moved by the sight? Think of the love and joy revealed on the face of the man who feeds people once a day or twice, feeds a hundred people or one thousand. This love and joy must be multiplied many, many times in the case of *Ambāl* who has been feeding billions and billions of living beings for aeons and aeons, feeding even people guilty of terrible sins. Some may not have actually committed sins but must have, all the same, harboured sinful thoughts. *Ambāl* is supreme love and compassion. Compassion indeed is loveliness. Without it bodily beauty is no beauty at all. We do not like to see our face in a mirror when we are angry or sorrow or ill. If we suffer from a slight fever, our body loses its charm. True bodily beauty is that of *Ambāl* who is not affected by either anger or sorrowful or illness: She is always the picture of love. So in your imagination try to visualise love in the highest form possible. And take that love to be the form of *Ambāl*.'

'After having said that *Ambāl* is the power belonging to the quiescent Brahman in its entirety, why should she be specially spoken of as love alone? If there exist in this world suffering, hatred and fear, are not these also derived from the power of the *Paramātmā*? Then why should It - and She (*Ambāl*) - be spoken of as love alone?'

Does not love exist in many forms in the world? The affection of a mother, the attachment of a brother, the intimacy of a friend, the love between husband and wife, the devotion of bhaktas, the compassion of the great, all these come under love. And do not all these originate from *Parāśakti*, from her love? So meditate on her as love. She is indeed all, even anger and fear, but if you think of her in these aspects you will not get happiness or peace of mind. You must think of her as the personification of love, a form that will be dear to you, and will bring you peace of mind. In keeping with your own limitations and nature, see the

limitless in a limited form. *Parāśakthi* knows no limits, but for your own sake place a limit on her and see her in the form of love. But meditate on that form of love, on the love that she is, as being limitless, boundless.

The Ganga is Ganga all the way from Gomukhi to the ocean. But will you be able to bathe where she tumbles down, roaring, from the high Himalayan hills? Even during her course through the plains you will have to choose a spot to bathe where the river is not too deep, where there are no whirlpools and where it is not infested with crocodiles. Although the river is all Ganga throughout, you step into it only at the spot where you can bathe happily and comfortably. In the same way, though *Parāśakthi* has different qualities, 'good' and 'bad', if you wish to worship her in the way you feel comfortable and happy, meditate on her as the Good One, as the Loving One. This is the reason why the great have held her as the *Paramātmā*'s power of compassion.

The *Paramātmā* and *Parāśakthi* are worshipped as the universal monarch and queen, as Father and Mother, as *Śiva* and *Ambāl*, as *Vishṇu* and Lakshmi. In *Siddhanta-Śaivism*, *Ambāl* is chiefly *Śiva*'s power of grace. Similarly, in the Vaishṇava system Lakshmi is the '*Purushakāram* that prompts *Mahā Vishṇu* to be compassionate. This system is called Srivaishnavism and it must have taken its name from the fact that prime consideration is given in it to the compassion of Lakshmi : that is why 'Sri' (meaning Lakshmi) figures first in the name.

It is not correct to say that love is just one among the many qualities of *Parāśakthi*. It is the foremost of her attributes. If she is associated with other qualities it is to show up her love as a diamond sparkling in a dark velvet setting. That is why in spite of her other forms which are fierce she appears as a flood of love, a flood of beauty. If this were not so, would people in Bengal and Kerala keep chanting her name in devotional fervour as 'Ma! Ma!'

or as 'Amme, Bhagavati'? If such a one appears in her beautiful form would the devout want anything more, ask for anything more?—.

Ambikā is a flood of beauty that will sweep away all our impurities like desire and anger, sorrow and fear, and the greatest fear of all, the fear- of rebirth or worldly existence. That beauty bestows all good fortune on us. The word 'bhāgya' is from 'bhāga' meaning 'excellent' The one in whom exist all 'bhāgas' is 'Bhagavān'; 'Bhagavati' is its feminine form. The prefix 'su' is added to 'bhāgya' to form the word 'saubhāgya' which means 'extremely auspicious'. 'Su' means 'good:' and from it is derived 'sau' in the same way as 'saukhyam' is derived from 'sukham'. Ambāl as Thripurasundari personifies all saubhāgya. So to think of her is to be rewarded with all good fortune, all well-being. The Āchāryā says (in Stanza 44 of the *Saundaryatahari*: 'Thanōthu kshēmam nastava vadana-Saundaryalaharī'. 'The beauty rising as a flood from your face, O! Mother, may it create our well-being.' Since it creates wellbeing, we understand that Ambāl's beauty itself grants us every kind of good fortune.

'May her beauty create well-being for all of us,' says the Āchāryā. 'Nah' means 'for us'. The Āchāryā does not ask for *his* well-being alone but for the well-being of all of us. Just as it rains for all, may well-being be universal. This is the Āchāryā's prayer inspired by his compassion for all beings, a prayer for the good of all creatures including those who cannot have a glimpse of her . This is reminiscent of the *Gāyatrī* manthra which contains a prayer for the cleansing of the intellect of all of us.

A man given to peevish argument said: 'After all the *Gāyatrī* is a prayer on behalf of all of us. So it would be enough if someone other than I chants it; there is no need for me to recite it.' This is not right; for everyone may choose to think that some one else would chant the manthra, the *Gāyatrī* for him. Many are not

entitled to chant the manthra , women, children, the ailing, those who are made impure by a death in their family, and so on. Keeping them in mind the manthra includes the words 'our intellect' (or 'our intelligence'). If one is entitled to chant it - the *Gāyatrī*- and there is nothing to prevent one from doing it and one does not chant it, the Lord too will have his reasons to say 'nāhi' (that is he will not bestow his blessings on that man).

I spoke to you about the *Āchāryā*'s prayer to *Ambāl*: 'May the beauty of your face create well-being for all of us' (that is for all people in the world). If what looks good to the eye also causes well-being, then beauty and grace must be combined in it. *Ambāl*'s compassionate heart it is that is embodiment of her beauty -- and the purpose of the same is creating universal welfare. And here it is confirmed that it is the inner being of grace that becomes the flood of beauty.

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THE HYMN ITSELF A PORTRAIT OF AMBIKA

The qualities or attributes of *Ambāl* are not distinct from her form. This hymn also is not something that is separate from her. Just as her infinite auspicious attributes have assumed a *kēsādhi-pāda* form through the parts of her body, the very *kēsādhi-pāda* description of her body constitutes her verbal form.

While concluding a devotional composition it is customary to mention the specific fruits or rewards to be gained by reading the same. It is called the '*phala-Sruthi*'. In the concluding stanza of the *Saundaryalaharī* the *Āchāryā* says in all humility that it was out of unthinking rashness on his part that he composed the hymn to *Ambāl* using a few words from her own cosmos of speech. The stanza previous to this is something like a *phala-Sruthi*. I say 'something like a *phala-Sruthi*' advisedly because there is no mention in it of the specific rewards to be obtained by reciting the

hymn. There is only a general statement that he who worships *Ambāl* will be blessed with certain rewards. What these are I shall tell you when I come to the stanza. What I wish to state here is that the *Āchāryā*, instead of mentioning the benefits to be obtained by reciting his hymn, speaks only of the fruits yielded by worshipping *Ambāl*. Why has he done so? Two reasons may be mentioned. Since the *Āchāryā* does not possess the least trace of ego he is averse to claiming that the hymn composed by him has the power to bring rewards. The second reason is the hymn itself is the form of *Ambāl*, her verbal personification. So to read or recite it is to worship her. When the work extolling *Ambāl* is itself her embodiment, the fruits yielded by reciting it must be the same as those yielded by worshipping her. This is the meaning conveyed by the stanza (99). The *Saundaryalaharī* is nothing but the beauty of *Parāsakthi* that has come to us as the *Bhagavatpādha*'s work of verbal beauty. *Ambāl*'s beauty that is like *rasālu* (*superior variety of mango*) is soaked in the *Āchāryā*'s poetical ambrosia divine.

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‘ĀNANDALAHARI’ : ADHVAITHA AND ŚĀKTHA

As already noted, the latter part of the *Saundaryalaharī* depicts the beauty of *Ambāl*, while the former part is predominantly devoted to a description of her *Śakthi* or power. It is the latter part that is truly ‘Saundaryalahari’; the former part is ‘*Ānandalahari*’.

The very first stanza of the hymn starts with a glorification of *Śakthi*. Then why is the first part called ‘*Ānandalahari*’ and not ‘*Śakthilahari*’?

This ananda or bliss arises from the knowledge called ‘chith’. This chith-knowledge is the Brahman becoming aware of Itself and it is what is meant by *jñāna*. Well, what is the meaning of

knowing oneself? Realising one's inward state that is still, serene and unwavering is the final message or teaching of Adhvaitha. But what do the *Śāktha Śāsthrās* say? They too speak of the still, serene and unwavering inner state, also the entity that has no attributes and has no function to perform or has nothing to 'do'. But, along with all this, they say: 'Is not the Brahman the basis of the active, phenomenal world? Is it not the support of all the qualities connected with it?' The *Śāktha* system also asks: 'Is it not a great *Śakthi* that supports the phenomenal world and conducts it?' It tries to establish that the quiescent Brahman itself inheres such a great power.

The *Āchāryā* has composed the *Saundaryalahari* in the nature of a *Śāktha* treatise. Seen from the standpoint of the *Śāktha* system, the chith of the Brahman, the *jñāna* that experiences itself, is not only the awareness of the inner non-dualistic state of tranquillity; it is also the knowledge of how it is the basis of the dualistic world manifested outside. The *Śāktha* doctrine gives importance to that aspect of the realisation of the Brahman which is imbued with *Śakthi*. A system based on *Śakthi* cannot be anything else. The *Śakthi* it speaks of is the form of chith, consciousness, knowledge.

The same individual cannot have two types of awareness. So, according to the *Śāktha* system, she (*Śakthi*) is also the Brahman's awareness of inner serenity. In the Brahman, that is sath-chith-*ānandā*, the eternal *Śiva* is sath; *Ambāl* is its awareness or chith. We cannot think of sath without any awareness, or of chith without the basis of sath. So *Śiva* and *Śakthi*, who are sath and chith, are always together or exist in union. The one does not exist without the other.

What is *ānandā* [with reference to *sath-chith-ānandā*]? The question arises when we consider the title '*Ānandalahari*'. The Brahman experiencing the fullness arising from the awareness that

it is imbued with chith is *ānandā* or bliss. According to Adhvaitha, such bliss is the Brahman experiencing *jñāna* in the state in which it is tranquil and in which it has no attributes. The *Śāktha* system does not raise any objection to it. But in the manner chith is spoken of, it gives importance to the sport of *Śakthi* - and it speaks of both chith and *Śakthi*. To explain, the chith that is the awareness of the Brahman reveals its power and finds fulfilment in its sport of the dualistic cosmos. So, chidananda, it says, is also *Śakthi-vilāsa-ānandā*, the bliss arising from the sport of *Śakthi*.

However, one point deserves to be mentioned here. It is not customary to speak of '*Śakthyānandā*' in the same way as we speak of *Śivānandā* or *sāntānandā*. Since *Śiva* denotes the serene sadvastu (Reality), *Śivānandā* also means *sāntānandā*. Mention of *Brahmānanda* too brings to mind the bliss that is associated with the tranquil. When we speak of *Ātmānandā*, we think of the experience of a state which is not associated with *Śakthi* or any activity, not with something which has any attributes: it is an experience of a state which is by itself and which has neither any attributes nor any function to perform. Why so? If there is something called *Śakthi*, how do we recognise its existence? It must be manifested and the function performed by it must be known. When it is still and quiescent how will it know *Śakthi*, experience it or know what is in it? We, *jīvātmās* (individual souls) are unable to know our serene inner state when we are involved in any work or activity. When we 'do' something our tranquillity is disturbed. We are drawn by external forces, dragged by them, and we remain all the time wavering. We ask ourselves: When will all this end? Will we ever remain peaceful, without anything to *do*?'

When the *Āchāryā* established the Adhvaitha system he saw the phenomenal world as an illusory mirage and he brushed it aside completely and taught us to remain fixed in the serene *Āthmā*. Only then would the individual Self be realised as the Brahman Itself. According to the Adhvaitha discipline the individual Self can

achieve the nonfunctioning and still state of the Brahman, but it is obvious that it cannot become the omnipotent entity that is the source of all activity. *Śāktha* thantras like *Śrīvidhyā* also speak of liberation, of the individual Self becoming inseparably united with the Brahman. They further state that *Parāśakti* herself blesses the individual Self with moksha. Since utter bliss, the ultimate state, does not relate to *Śakti* and since such bliss is associated with quiescence, Adhvaitha speaks of *Śivānandā* and *sāntānandā*, but there is no mention in it of anything like *Śakthyānandā*.

But in the *Śāktha* discipline *chidānandā* is chiefly *Śakthyānandā*.

The Brahman, which stands for the great *jnāna*, is imbued with chith and its bliss is *chidānandā*. It is the same as *jnānananda*. In the *Śāktha* system when this *chidānandā* is referred to, *Ambāl* herself being chith incarnate, the joy that is hers in her sport of creating the dualistic world is specially mentioned.

Adhvaitha does not explicitly mention the association of *Śakti* with the Brahman. According to it, the dualistic universe is caused by *Māyā* of which we do not know the whys and wherefores. In it *chidānandā* is nothing but *sāntānandā*. According to the *Śāktha* system, *Ambāl* is engaged in her cosmic function for her sport; she is both the universal and the outward and indeed all. She is the embodiment of *chidānandā* and she experiences bliss both in the quiescent inner *jnāna* and in the outward *jnāna* characterised by power.

According to Adhvaitha, the *Parabrahman* has no outward *jnāna*; indeed it cannot have it. To associate it with dualism is to make it impure and to do so is a sacrilege. Not so in the *Śāktha* system. To savour the *rasa* of the divine sport, the still inwardly turned Brahman becomes unstill and is outwardly turned as *Śakti*. The *Śāktha* system glorifies this *Śakti*. The very first stanza of our hymn is a paean of praise to this aspect of *Śakti*.

The individual Self cannot, on its own, realise the peaceful state and find fulfillment. However, the *Śāktha* system shows a way for an individual to find joy in *Ambāl*'s power and glory. What the Adhvaitha system dismisses as the dualistic empirical world of *Māyā* that we do not comprehend, the *Śāktha* system describes as the sport of *Ambāl* in which we find delight. The individual Self cannot achieve non-dualistic union in *Śakthi*, it can have the same only in the quietudinous Brahman; according to the *Śāktha* doctrine it can share in *Ambāl*'s joy arising from her power which is the nature of *chidānandā*.

Great men like the *Āchāryā*, who had Adhvaithic experience, performed their wordly duties and also engaged themselves in devotion in this state. But they did not elaborate on this aspect since they were mainly concerned with making men go directly to the goal of tranquillity. The *Śāktha* and other systems like bhakti clearly and explicitly deal with the joy of experiencing the sport of the Lord. In some places, this joy is elevated to a plane higher than Adhvaithic bliss.

The divine play originates in *Śakthi*: there is immense joy in sporting. That is why the part dealing with the power of *Ambāl* [her *līlā*] is called '*Ānandalaharī*'.

Did I not tell you that *Śakthi* and chith are referred to as being identical? In keeping with this idea, in one of the stanzas (8) in the '*Ānandalaharī*' section occurs the term '*chidānandalaharī*': '*Bhajanthivam dhanyāḥ katichana chidānandalaharīm*'. It means: 'A few extremely fortunate people worship you, knowing you as a flow of *chidānanda*.'

The *Saundaryalaharī*, the flow of beauty, is meant not only for those who can have direct *dharsan* of *Ambāl*. It can be appreciated by all and, through the *Āchāryā*'s description of her, they can perceive her with their mind's eye. But only a few rare

and fortunate people - 'katichana dhanyah'- can have the perception of her *chidānandalahari* which is her *Śāktilahari*.

Let it be that we cannot grasp the great concept called *chidānandā*. After all, *Ambāl*'s beauty itself gives us great joy, does it not? Is not that beauty capable of giving us everything including the ultimate bliss of liberation? So let us be satisfied with what little we know about *chidānandā* and other matters mentioned in the hymn.

There is much to speak about the points on which Adhvaitha and the *Śrīvidhya* system agree and those on which they differ.

Agreement means complete identity. According to *Brahmavidhyā* or the Adhvaitha discipline, the individual Self, at the end of *sādhana* or spiritual endeavour, becomes one with the Brahman. The *Śrīvidhya* system also speaks the same but it differs with Adhvaitha on the subject of creation. In *Brahmavidhyā*, creation is explained according to 'vivartavadhā' and in the *Śrīvidhya* system according to 'ābhāsavādhā'. 'Vivarta' means false appearance; for instance, a rope appearing to be a serpent. The rope is the reality, the serpent is the falsity or the untruth. It is the reality (of the rope) that looks like the falsity (of the serpent). According to Adhvaitha, the reality that is the Brahman appears as the false living world. 'ābhāsā' means 'reflected light'. For example, the sun shines reflected in the water. The *Śāktha* system believes that the plenary *Chithsakthi*, within a certain discipline, is reflected as the living universe (actually many universes). Without the original sun there is no reflected image of it: it is the sun that appears as its image in the water. Which means the *Śāktha* system is basically Adhvaithic. But [with regard to the sun and its reflected image] we must see that the sun outside is one entity, its reflection in the water is another. To that extent the image has an element of reality. In the same way, there is an element of reality in the phenomenal world (*jīva-*

jagat). The *Śāktha* system does not hold the view that this phenomenal world (the reflected image) is false as does Adhvaitha which calls it a 'mithya' or false.

Since there is no room for asking the question of how *Māyā* came to be, Adhvaitha dismisses the phenomenal world as a myth (mithya). The *Śāktha* doctrine, on the other hand, has it that in the sport of *Ambāl* the power of her chith is reflected as countless images. In this way she remains 'active in multitudinous ways. The *Śāktha* doctrine holds the view that, basing ourselves on the *jīva-jagat* or empirical world, we must use our senses, the various objects in the world, etc., as instruments to achieve union with the real and eternal Brahman.

What all of us desire is this ultimate state of union with the Brahman. All our *sādhana* must be aimed at it. There is nothing we can do about how we came to be, how the world came into existence and so on. We have nothing to gain by worrying about whether the world is *Vivarta* or a false appearance, nor do we have anything to lose by wondering whether it is an *ābhāsā* or a reflected image. No importance need be given to the two systems, Adhvaitha and *Śāktha*, being different.

Both take the same view about what we must do, the state we must ultimately aim at achieving and how we must exert ourselves for the same. Let those who have the courage to dismiss the world as *Māyā* do so. As for ourselves we are children. And like children playing with toy utensils thinking them to be real, let us like children play with Mother. She herself will grant us what is to be granted at the appropriate time and bless us with final union with her.

I have mentioned a few basic points on which there is agreement between Adhvaitha and the *Śāktha Śāstrās* and a few points on which they differ. So much will do-. More would entail a great deal of philosophical inquiry, wrestling with ideas and

opinions that are hypothetical in nature but may seem part of an established system. Our present concern is fixing our mind with love on *Ambāl*, the Mother, who is the embodiment of beauty. That is the very purpose of my speaking to you about the *Saundaryalaharī*. While doing so, referring to certain philosophical matters could not be helped.

We must note some points in brief. In place of the basic quiescent Brahman in Adhvaitha, the *Śāktha* system has *Śivam*. According to Adhvaitha Vēdhantā, the *Parabrahman*, though quiescent and without any function, is *chinmayā*, that is imbued with *jñāna*. In the *Śāktha* doctrine, in place of chith we have *Śakthi* who is not only imbued with *jñāna* but also (as is obvious) with *Śakthi*. The Adhvaithic Brahman which is serene and quiescent is self-contained. In the *Śāktha* system, the quiescent *Śiva* inheres *Śakthi* or power or energy, and the *jñāna* and strength of this *Śakthi* are manifested outwardly in her dualistic sport. In Adhvaitha, as the very name suggests, the Brahman is the only reality. What appears as a second to it is caused by *Māyā*, but the Brahman has no connection with this *Māyā*. How *Māyā* came to be, what it is, is a riddle. 'It is not necessary to inquire into the question', says Adhvaitha. 'What we want is the extinction of *Māyā* and achieving direct perception, realisation of the One Truth'. Adhvaitha has for this purpose cut out the path of *jñāna*. In the *Śāktha* system, the dualistic manifestation is attributed to the desire of *Śiva* who is conjoined with *Śakthi* and it is all for the joy of sport. The power of *Māyā* is also an aspect of this doctrine. Such details are not necessary now.

It is the Brahman itself that appears as the individual Self because of *Māyā*. Adhvaitha exhorts us to dispel *Māyā* by pursuing the path of *jñāna*. The individual self will then become the *Parabrahman*. Fundamentally, the individual self and *Śivam* are one and the same; in mōksha they will become one. This is accepted in the *Śāktha* system, particularly in the *Śrīvidhyā*

thanthra. The Dvaita, *Viśiṣṭādhvāitha*, *Siddhānta-Śāiva* (*Śāiva-Śiddhantā*), *Śrīkantha-Śāiva* [*Śivādhvāitha*] and *Kāshmīra Śāiva* systems - all these, after starting from points of view fundamentally different from those of *Adhvāitha*, come close to it, in the order they are mentioned, *Kāshmīra Śāivism* coming closest to *Adhvāitha*. More than that it is in the *Śāktha* system that the non-dualistic identity of the individual self and the Brahman is mentioned. The difference between the two systems is on the subject of creation [as mentioned earlier]. There are no differences of view between them on the question of liberation. *Adhvāitha* treats Dvaita or dualism as the construction of *Māyā* and it is to be rejected outright. In the *Śāktha* system, it is the creation of *Parāśakti* who is the power of the Brahman. 'All this dualistic manifestation is the sport of *Parāśakti*. Learn to look at it as such. Are you not also created by that *Śakti*, from that *Śakti* and of that *Śakti*? Without you knowing it, has she not herself made you think, through the power of *Māyā*, that you are different? Sever your ties with *Māyā* by praying to her and by adhering to *sādhana* according to the *Śrīvidhya thanthra*. Transcending *Māyā*, become one with the *Śakti* that is the basis of all; and, finally, become united with that one tranquil Reality with which *Śakti* herself is united,' so says the *Śāktha* system.

Adhvāitha and the *Śāktha* doctrine - especially the *Śrīvidhya thanthra* of the latter - are very close to each other. The *Āchāryā* must have felt that those who found it difficult to follow the path of *jñāna* could take to the worship of *Ambāl* according to *Śrīvidhya*. It must have been his belief that those who did so would advance from the point of looking upon the world as the dualistic creation of *Śakti* to the final stage of *Adhvāitha*. In his hymns to *Śiva*, *Viṣṇu* and other deities there are no references to the doctrines pertaining to the *Śivāgamās* or to the *Vaiṣṇava* thanthras. They are works composed in a spirit of devotion. If you go looking hard you may find one or two references to *Śāiva* and

Vaiṣṇava doctrines. But in the *Saundaryalaharī* a considerable portion, that too of the first part, is entirely devoted to the *Śāktha* system. Even if you hold the view that it is not the work of the *Āchāryā*, consider the whole work together, including the second part which, it is agreed, is by the *Āchāryā*. His purpose would then be clear to us. 'If you cannot follow the path of *Adhvaitha*, the next option for you is *Śrīvidhya*.' Also in some hymns to *Devi* by the *Āchāryā* the subject of *Śrīvidhya* is dealt with at length.

In this Mutt *[Kānchi Kāmakōṭi]* - indeed in all mutts established by the *Āchāryā* - the worship of *Īsvarā* is Vēdhic and not according to the *Śaiva thanthra*; the worship of *Ambāl* too is Vedic; but otherwise there are also rites according to the *Śrīvidhya thanthra*.

Śrīvidhya integrates dualism and non-dualism and, in the final analysis, it is non-dualism. It says that the non-dualistic *Śiva*, who does not have a second, and *Śakthi*, the creator of the dualistic world, are inseparable. In the 'One Thousand Names of Lalitha', the name occurring before the last one is '*Śiva-Śakthi-aikya-rūpiṇī*'.

Here, in the *Saundaryalaharī* [that is in its first part, '*Ānandalahari*'] the first words of the very first stanza are '*Sivah Sakthyā yuktaḥ*'. The words come rather abruptly, as if prompted by someone. I will now, conclude my introduction and take up the stanzas one by one'.

* * *

THE HYMN TO ŚAKTHI STARTS WITH ŚIVA

Śivah Śakthyā yuktho yādhi bhavathi Śāktah prabhaviḥtum
Na chēdhēvam dhēvō na khalu kuśalah spandhitumapi
Athasthvam ārādhyam Hariharavirinchādbibhirapi
Prañanthum sthōthum va kathamakruthapuṇyah prabhavathi.

Our hymn starts with this stanza. It states an important *Śāktha* concept : that *Ambāl* is a power higher than even Brahma, *Vishṇu* and Rudra who perform the three functions, respectively, of creating all the worlds, sustaining them and destroying them. *Siva* is indeed the Parabrahmam without any attributes and is still in his non-dualistic state: And he can stir and make the Thrimūrthi (Brahma, *Vishṇu* and Rudra) perform their dualistic cosmic functions only if she activates him.

The Thrimūrthi and other powerful deities worship you. Even Brahmam you keep under your sway and urge to activity. From a housefly flapping its wings and an ant crawling, all activity and work in the world are attributed to your power, your resolve. That being the case, how can any individual prostrate himself before you or sing your praises by himself [that is without the power granted by you, *Ambāl*]?

My love and devotion for you, my prostrating myself before you, are these to be ascribed to my will, are they my doing, my resolve? I have just begun to compose this hymn to you. But can I do it without the energy imparted by you, without your grace and without your consent?’

The *Āchāryā* asks *Ambāl* thus, not explicitly, not in so many words, but subtly, merely hinting at what he wants to convey.

In the same oblique manner he says: ‘It is you who impart the power to sing your praises. But do you give such power to anybody and everybody? No. Even if you are our Mother, you grant your blessings according to the *karmā* of each. So you will not grant the great good fortune of adoring you to the undeserving. How does one qualify to receive it? One must have earned merit in one’s past lives by performing many good deeds : that is how one becomes deserving. No one else is qualified to pay you obeisance or to extol you.’

The *Āchāryā* does not say everything plainly. In fact many things are said in this, the very first stanza, indirectly. This is an important characteristic of poetry: unlike in prose everything must not be explained in a plain manner. Certain matters must be left unsaid or merely implied in what you say. Only then will one's interest be aroused, only then will there be aesthetic pleasure. The rasa or juice of a fruit does not drip outside but is contained in it. Similar is the case with poetry. A poem must be 'rasavat', that is it must have hidden in it that which gives aesthetic enjoyment. It is also said that poetry must be 'sāravat'. It means it must have substance: all unwanted things must be discarded and the juice or essence alone extracted. This means there is no circumlocution or prolixity: whatever is said is said clearly and briefly. The juice extracted from a basketful of limes will be only so much as to fill a small jar. So in poetry the ideas must be presented in a condensed manner, in the form of 'essence'. A poem must be so composed that the connoisseur will himself discover its inner meaning and the beauty of its images and try to understand the ideas conveyed by it through his own interpretation.

There is one more point that emerges as the inner meaning of the last line of the stanza. '*Prañanthum sthōthum vā katham akrutapunyah prabhavathi*'. 'How can anyone who has not earned any merit pay you obeisance or adore you?' asks the *Āchāryā*. But, since he himself sings *Ambālī's* praises, does he think that he has earned much merit? To construe so would be wrong. In a later passage the *Āchāryā* says, abasing himself, 'Bestow upon me too your sidelong glance' and 'Place your foot on my head also.' One who speaks thus will never boast in this manner: 'I have done a little good, that is why I am able to sing your praises.' So we have to ponder over the stanza and discover the inner meaning suggested by the words in it.

What did the *Āchāryā* say at the beginning? 'She (*Ambāl*) activates *Śiva*, the quiescent Reality, that does not stir otherwise.' Following the same logic it must be that the *Āchāryā* felt thus when he composed the hymn 'I have not earned any merit but I have been given by *Ambāl* the power to compose the hymn that is meant for those who have earned merit.'

'How can anyone who has not earned any merit extol you?' If the *Āchāryā* were to ask the same question, we can imagine his own answer to it. 'You have the power to accomplish anything. You are capable of activating even the quiescent *Śiva*. It is this power of yours that has inspired my tongue, my speech, to sing your praises.' To give such a construction would be after the *Āchāryā*'s own heart.

'*Prarānthum*' (to prostrate oneself): here it is a bodily function that is referred to. '*Sthōthum*' (to extol): what is meant here is a verbal function. Of the triad, '*manō-vāk-kāyam*' (mind-speech-body), the latter two are covered by '*sthōthum*' and '*prarānthum*'. What about the first? It is only after thinking of *Ambāl*, meditating on her, that one prostrates oneself before her and sings her praises. So the mind is also brought in this way. This idea is implied in the stanza. Here we see that mind, speech and body are offered to *Ambāl*. The seed sown in the first stanza of the hymn attains its final stage of the ripened fruit in the one-hundredth stanza. And the fruit signifies self-surrender to *Ambāl*, the offering of oneself to her.

If one cannot pay obeisance to *Ambāl* and adore her because one has not earned merit in one's previous births, it means that one cannot take the path of devotion. The *Āchāryā* who has spoken thus with regard to the way of bhakti expresses a similar view with regard to the way of *jñāna* in his *Vivēkachūdāmaṇi*: '*Mukthirñō sathakōtijanmasu krutaih puṇyairvinā labhyathē*.' It means that

liberation by following the path of *jnāna* cannot be attained without having acquired merit in one hundred crores of lives.

An interesting point to be noted here is that in the *Saundaryalaharī*, which is a devotional work, the *Āchāryā* does not explicitly state, at the beginning that with divine grace alone is one persuaded to take the right path, whether it is that of *bhakti* or of *jnāna*. Now the world believes that God is 'bundled up' in the path of *jnāna* and kept aside. But what does the *Āchāryā* himself say in one of the early stanzas of his *Vivēkachūdāmaṇi* which is a treatise on *jnāna*? It is with divine grace, he states, that one is born a mortal, desires liberation and comes by a high-souled guru. '*Daivānugraha hētukam*' are the words used in the context. *Maṇikkavāchakar* echoes the same view when he says that one is inspired by God to take the path of devotion.

The hymn starts with the words, '*Śivah Śākthyā*', that is with the highly auspicious word '*Śiva*'. The stanza says that *Śiva* will not be able even to stir if he is not with *Śākthi*. But it must be noted that it starts with '*Śiva*' not with '*Śākthi*'. We usually use the term 'sathi-pathi' (wife and husband), 'Mrs and Mr', that is wife first and then husband. The hymn is all about the glory of *Śākthi*. It says that without *Śākthi* *Śiva* has no greatness. If he remains alive even after swallowing the *Kālakūta* poison it is because of the power of her *thātankās* (ear-ornaments). The hymn which goes so far in exalting *Śākthi* mentions the name of *Śiva* first, at the very beginning, and then only the name of *Dēvi* (*Śākthi*).

Why is it so? The *Āchāryā* was always careful about reminding the world of the tenets of the *DharmaSāsthras*. In many ways *Īśvarā* and *Ambāl* are different from the worldly husband and wife pair. A woman is customarily called 'abala' (one who is 'weak'). It is the man who protects her. *Bala* and *Śākthi* mean the same. When you come to the divine pair, *Śiva* and *Śākthi*, the very

name of the wife is *Śakthi*, that is Power. Without her *Śiva* has to remain doing nothing. When we want to tell someone, 'Go and sit quietly in a corner,' we say [in Tamil] '*Be seated quietly like Śiva*'.

The *Dharmasāsthṛās*, which point the way to how life is to be lived in this world, have it that the wife is subordinate to the husband. When we regard the divine pair, *Īśvarā* and *Ambāl*, it is the reverse: the former is the quiescent Brahman without any attributes while the latter is the great power (also known as *Māyāśakthi*) and she is behind the conduct of the world.

It is not conceptually alone that *Śiva* is thought to be powerless and *Śakthi* powerful. In the poetic tradition also, it is customary while portraying love or *srungārā* to give the heroine a place higher than that of the hero. When peace is restored between the two after an unfriendly spell, it is the hero who falls at the feet of the heroine - this is how poets see their relationship. We see the same in the *Gītagōvindam*. *Krishṇa* requests *Radha*: 'Please, in your large-heartedness, place your foot on my head as an ornament for it.' Such sentiments are expressed in stories relating to *Śiva* and *Pārvathi* in poetical works as well as in the *Purāṇās*. In the *Saundaryalaharī* itself we see examples of the same in the latter part. '*Pādyam*' is one of the rites of worship. We offer water to a guest. Similarly, when we perform *pūjā* to a deity and make it rise in all its grace we pour water over its feet in the same way as we offer water to a guest to wash his feet. The water poured over the feet of a deity is *pādyam*. The *Āchāryā* says in a later stanza that the Ganga in the matted hair of *Śiva* serves as *pādyam* for *Ambāl*. What does this mean? Does it not mean that *Śiva*'s head rests at the feet of *Ambāl*? Only then will the Ganga in his matted locks become the water to wash her feet.

In another passage this idea [of *Śiva*'s head being placed at the feet of *Ambāl*] is expressed more explicitly. The poetic convention is that even when the hero (*nāyakā*) falls at the feet of

the heroine (*nāyaki*), the latter is not remorseful and is not reconciled to her husband. What happens now is something that will cause a feeling of awkwardness in us. But we must remember that the poet tries to give a higher place to *srungārā* or the erotic rasa in his poem. So... the hero falls at the feet of the heroine. But her anger - or pretended anger - is not assuaged or it does not seem to be assuaged. She kicks him on his head. Thereupon he rises, exclaiming in his anxiety, 'Have you, dear, hurt your foot?' Only then is she appeased. Such is the divine resolve that the *Āchāryā*'s poem should have all the characteristics of poetry in full measure. So he too has portrayed the hero-heroine relationship (in this case the relationship between *Śiva* and *Ambālī*) according to the poetic traditions.

As jagadguru, the *Āchāryā* thought that it was his first duty to teach the world the code of conduct laid down in the *Dharmaśāstrhās*. Next in order was to speak about devotion (through his hymns to various deities) according to the degree of maturity of people and then to teach philosophy, *jñāna*. Despite all this, as he composed this hymn, inspired by *Ambālī*, he had to keep in mind both the *Śāktā* concept and our poetic tradition. So we find him raising *Ambālī* to a place higher than that of her husband *Paramāśiva*. He does the same according to our poetics in which the *nāyaki* is depicted as being superior to the *nāyakā*. However, the *Āchāryā* must have felt thus: 'All *Dharmaśāstrhās* proclaim that the wife must remain loyal to her husband. If a woman is married to a stone, then she must respect that stone as her husband. In this hymn *Ambālī* is depicted differently, as being higher than *Śiva*. As one occupying the seat of dharma I wonder what would happen if all women were to follow the example of *Ambālī*.' It is as a compensation for this that, at the very beginning of the hymn, the *Āchāryā* mentions the name of *Śiva* first and that of *Śakti* after it. Although, later in the stanza itself, it is mentioned that *Śiva*'s greatness lies in being together with *Ambālī*,

he starts the stanza with the word 'Śīva' to convey the message to womankind that *Ambālī*'s greatness too lies in *Śīva*'s name being given precedence over hers and in her being submissive to him.

There are stanzas appearing later in the hymn that clearly state that *Ambālī* is the highest of the '*pathivrathās*' and that her conduct is fully in accord with the *Dharmaśāsthrās*. In Stanza 29 there is a description of *Ambālī* seated on the throne in royal splendour as *Rājarājēśvari*. The celestials prostrate themselves before her. But now, as she sees *Īśvarā* appearing on the scene, she is all excitement and she rushes to receive him respectfully and affectionately. As she does so, her attendants warn her that she might trip over the crowns of the celestials prostrating themselves before her. In another stanza (64) the *Āchāryā* says that because of speaking tirelessly of the many qualities of her husband *Ambālī*'s tongue becomes red like a hibiscus flower. The story of the different ways in which *Paramēśvarā* sports is set to music and *Sarasvathi* plays it on her veena (Stanza 66). *Ambālī* delights in it, listening to it again and again. In another verse (82) the *Āchāryā* observes that prostrating herself again and again before her husband her knees become stiff. In one of the last stanzas (96) the *Āchāryā* raises her to great heights by calling her '*sathīnām acharamē*', meaning the first among *pathivrathās*.

The *Āchāryā* was particular that he should not place before the community an ideal contrary to the tenets of the *Śāsthrās*, that is why he begins his hymn to *Ambālī* with the name of her husband coming first. 'Mother and father': in the *Vēdhās* themselves '*Mathrudēvo*' comes before '*Pithrudēvo*'. Even so, since the *Āchāryā* has often to speak of *Ambālī* as being higher than *Śīva*, as if to compensate for this, he gives the name of *Śīva* at the very start of the hymn and before that of *Śakthi*. The import of this stanza (1) is that *Śīva*'s greatness depends on his being united with *Śakthi*. But by the manner in which the words are used we have to

construe that *Ambāl*'s own greatness is dependent on her being united with him--so first *Śiva* and then *Śakthi* ('*Śakthyā*').

The primordial couple exalt each other: she exalts him and he exalts her. As a matter of fact the one is neither lower nor higher than the other. The two are indeed equal. '*Anyōṇya-sadruṣam*': *Īśvarā* and *Ambāl* are equal in their glory.

We use the word '*Śamayam*' for religion. For example, '*Hindu samayam*', *Śamaṇa* (*Śramaṇa*) *samayam*, and so on. If the word is used as a common name for religion it must be traced to the idea of *Śiva* and *Śakthi* being regarded as equal. In the *Śāktā* and *Śāiva* concepts one of the ways of worship is called '*samayāchāra*'. It is adoration on a high plane with no external puja; a deity is meditated upon as residing in one's heart. Why the name '*samayam*' for it? In it *Ambāl* and *Īśvarā* are to be meditated upon as being equal in five different ways. This kind of worship has the name of '*Pancha-samayam*'. First, *Śiva* and *Ambāl* are equal in their names: if he is *Śiva*, she is *Śivā*; if he is Hamsa, she is Hamsi; if he is Bhairava, she is Bhairavi; if he has the name of *Śamayā* itself, then she is *Śamayī*. Second, they are equal in their *rūpa* or form also. As *Kāmēśvarā* and *Kāmēśvari* their colour is red. Both have four hands and three eyes and the crescent moon in their hair; the two have the same weapons in their hands, bow and arrow, the noose and the goad. Third, they reside in the same places: on the Meru peak, at the centre of the *Maṇidvīpa* (Island of Jewels) in the ocean of amrutha or ambrosia, and on the Bindu of the *Śrīchakra*. Four, both perform the same function, what is called Panchakruthya. Five, the blessings received by the world from them are the same.

The idea of *Śiva* and *Ambāl* being equal must be deeply etched in our minds. When we are asked to view all creatures in the world as equal, should we speak of some gods or goddesses as being lower or higher than some other gods or goddesses? It is

especially wrong to make a distinction in status between a god and a goddess who form a couple or who are our Mother and Father. So at the back of our minds we must always have the awareness that the two are one indeed. However, there are occasions or reasons to look upon the one as being higher than the other. The mother matters to a child more than anyone else when it snuggles up to her and talks to her sweetly. At another time it may show its affection for its father in the same manner. The point to note is that on such occasions the mother or father, as the case may be, has the child's total attention which is possible only when it thinks that the one is higher than the other (or, in other words, that the one means more to it than the other). And only with such total and exclusive attention does love come welling up in its heart. Its behaviour in such a context will not be misunderstood by either of the parents. If the child loves its mother more than its father at a particular time, the latter will not mind being seen as 'lower' than the mother. The same applies to the mother when the child appears to have more affection for the father. Looked at from the poetic angle, the divine Parents conduct their sport in such a way that the 'poet child' finds delight in seeing the Mother to be higher than the Father (or the Father higher than the Mother). When a child regards the divine Parents in pursuance of a philosophical concept, in consonance with its attitude, the Mother may appear to be higher than the Father or, it may be, the Father will appear to be higher than the Mother.

The *Saundaryalaharī* is as much a treatise on the *Śākthā* system as it is a devotional work. But, on the whole, it is a glorification of *Ambāl*. Since our *Jagadāchāryā* (*Ādhi Śankarā*) was anxious that this should not lead to people taking a view contrary to what is laid down in the *Dharmasāstrhās* with regard to the husband-and-wife relationship, he has 'corrected' the importance otherwise given to *Ambāl* by showing *Īsvarā* in some places to be

'higher' than she is. This is how he mentions the name of *Śiva* at the very beginning of the hymn, then that of *Śakthi* following it.

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IMPARTING LIFE-FORCE TO ŚIVA MASCULINE AND FEMININE NAMES

It would be interesting to note that though *Śiva*'s importance is shown by his name appearing as the first word in the hymn, devotees of *Ambāl* see her greatness reflected in that very name. They observe : '*Śakthi* is joined to *Śiva*. And here, (in the first stanza), they are together as seen from the fact that the word '*Śakthyā*' is linked to the name first mentioned, '*Śiva*'. But this is not the only point to be noted. There is *Śakthi* joined to the very first syllable '*Śi*' in the name of *Śiva*. It is only because of this that the name of *Śiva* is a living reality.' [*Śakthi* is the life-breath of the name of *Śiva*.] I shall tell you how.

There is the vowel 'i' in the very first syllable '*Śi*' of '*Śiva*'. '*Śi*' is formed by the vowel 'i' added to the consonant '*Ś*'. This 'i' or 'ī' is itself the name of *Ambāl*. The general rule is that consonants are *Śiva* letters and vowels *Śakthi* letters. Moreover, among vowels 'i' and 'ī' personify *Ambāl*. Just as the quiescent Brahman has the name of *Praṇava*, so too *Śiva-Śakthi* - that is *Śiva*, the functionless Brahman, conjoined to *Śakthi*, the functioning Brahman - has also a *Praṇava*. In it *Śakthi* is the letter 'i'. There is the support of the *Vēdhas* themselves for the view that 'i-kara' ('or ī-kara') is *Ambāl*. In the *Vēdhic* '*Srisūktam*' *Ambāl* in the form of Lakshmi in the heart-lotus is called Padmini and it is said, 'I go for refuge to her who is '*ī-kara*'. Is not the very word 'Sri' '*ī-kara*'?

The majority of masculine names end in 'a-kara' like '*Śankarā*', '*Nārāyanā*', '*Rāmā*', '*Krishṇā*', '*Subrahmaṇyā*' and '*Ganeśhā*'. In Sanskrit, these names become *Śankarāḥ*,

Nārāyaṇah, and so on. In Tamil [and in Malayalam] these names are pronounced as ‘*Āṅkaran*’, ‘*Nārāyaṇan*’, and so on. Hindi-speaking people say ‘*Āṅkar*’, ‘*Nārāyaṇ*’, and so on. In Tamil Nadu also this style is becoming increasingly popular.

The majority of feminine names end in ‘i’: ‘*Āṅkari*’, ‘*Nārāyaṇi*’, ‘*Lakshmi*’, ‘*Sarasvathi*’, ‘*Pārvathi*’, ‘*Kāmākshi*’, ‘*Mīnākshi*’, ‘*Visālākshi*’. For the names of the *Śakthis* or consorts of male deities we change a-ending names to i-ending ones: ‘*Āṅkarā-Āṅkari*’, ‘*Īśvarā-Īśvari*’, ‘*Narasimhā-Narasimhi*’. But there is something special about ‘*Nārāyaṇi*’ and ‘*Vaiṣṇavi*’. They are not the names of the consort of *Vishṇu* but the names of *Ambāl*, his sister. Such is the closeness between *Vishṇu* and *Ambāl*. In this context it is further interesting to note that the two names, ‘Hara and Hari’, are not similar to ‘*Āṅkarā and Āṅkari*’. Hari is not the name of *Ambāl* but of *Vishṇu*. ‘*Dēva-Dēvi*’, ‘*sahōdara-sahōdari*’, ‘*putra-putri*’ the a-ending masculine names or nouns become i-ending feminine names or nouns. In the feminine names of people in Europe [or Christian feminine names even in India] there are many that end in ‘i’ or ī’ [that is phonetically] ‘Mary’, ‘Lucy’, ‘Annie’, ‘Julie’ and so on. In our own country masculine a-ending names (they are Sanskritic) have different endings in different parts: ‘*Āṅkaran*’ and ‘*Nārāyaṇan*’ in one part; ‘*Āṅkar*’ and ‘*Nārāyaṇ*’ in another and ‘*Āṅkarūdu*’ and ‘*Nārāyaṇudu*’ in a third. But when it comes to feminine names ending in ‘i’, there is no such change. ‘*Kāmākshi*’ is ‘*Kāmākshi*’ in all parts, so too ‘*Mīnākshi*’ and other ‘i-ending’ feminine names.

Like ‘*Āṅkarā-Āṅkari*’ and ‘*Īśvarā-Īśvari*’, we do not say ‘*Rudrā-Rudri*’. The feminine gender of ‘*Rudrā*’ is ‘*Rudrani*’. Similarly ‘*Śivāni*’ for ‘*Śiva*’, ‘*Bhavāni*’ for ‘*Bhava*’, ‘*Indrāni*’ for ‘*Indra*’ and ‘*Brahmaṇi*’ for ‘*Brahma*’. Here too we find that the names in the feminine gender end in ‘i’.

The feminine gender of ‘*Śiva*’ is not only ‘*Śivāni*’. ‘*Śivā*’ also means *Śiva*’s wife. Likewise, we have ‘*Rāma-Ramā*’, ‘*Krishṇa-*

Krishnā’. It means that masculine names ending in ‘a’ end in the feminine gender either in ‘ī’ or ‘ā’. Though the feminine gender of *Rāma* is *Ramā*, that of ‘*Abhirāma*’ is ‘*Abhirāmi*’.

Apart from those ending in ‘ī’ and ‘ī’, there are many feminine names ending in ‘a’ like *Umā*, *Ramā*, *Durgā*, *Bālā*, *Lalithā* and *Sārādā*.

If we see the names of *Ambāl* in the *Amarakōṣam* we will note that they end either in ī or in a.

Umā Kathyāyanī Gaurī Kālī Haimavathī Īśvarī
Śivā Bhavānī Rudrānī Śārvānī Sarvamangalā
Aparnā Pārvathī Durgā Mrudānī Chandikā Ambikā
Āryā Dhākshāyanī chaiva Girijā Menakātmajā
Karmamotī thu Chamūndā Charmamuṇḍā thu charchikā

Let us see the names of Lakshmi given in the same work.

Lakshmī Padmālayā Padmā Kamalā Śrī haripriyā
Indirā LōkaMātha Mā Kshīrōdathanayā Ramā
Bhārgavī Lōkajananī Kshīrasāgarakanyakā

[Most of] the names of Sarasvathī also end in ‘a’ or ‘ī’

Brāhmi thu Bhāratī Bhāshā Gīr vāk vānī Sarasvathī

The root of ‘*Vāk*’ is ‘*vāch*’. Only this name ends in a consonant, but it is a rare case. By and large feminine names end either in ‘ī’ or in ‘ā’.

In Sanskrit there are no words at all ending in ‘ai’, though it occurs in manthra *Śāsthrā* in the context of *Ambāl* being referred to as ‘*Vāgdēvī*’.

Words ending in ‘ā’ are exclusively feminine. There are no masculine names ending in ‘ā’.

In other countries too there are many examples of feminine names ending in ‘ā’: ‘*Dianā*’, ‘*Julianā*’, ‘*Fatimā*’, ‘*Khadhija*’.

Masculine and feminine names of white people end in different ways. But in their case too the feminine forms of masculine names end in 'a': '*Alexander: Alexandrā*' '*Victō-Victoriā*'. While there are no masculine names at all in India ending in 'ā' there are a few in the West or among Judaeo-Christian people like '*Joshūā*', '*Geremiā*', ending in that vowel.

There are a number of masculine names too ending in 'i': 'Hari', 'Ganapati', 'Ramamurti' and so on. But there are only feminine names ending in 'ā'. If you see the book on declension and conjugation you will find that, after the a-ending 'Rāma', it is the i-ending 'Hari'. There are no feminine names at all ending in 'a'. The very first in the book ends in 'ā' - '*Ramā*'. Then you have the word 'mathi' ending in 'i', followed by 'Gaurī' ending in 'ī'.

In the *Vishṇu-Sahasranāmam* you see names like '*Brahmā*', '*Dhatā*', '*Thvastā*' and '*Āthmā*' apparently ending in 'ā' 'He [the *Mahaswāmī*] says that there are no masculine names ending in 'ā'. But what about these names?' people may ask. However, all those words apparently ending in 'a' have stems that are different. The stem of 'Brahma' is 'Brahmam', of '*Āthmā*' 'Athman', of '*Dhatā*' and 'Thvastā' 'Dhathru' and 'Thvasthu' respectively.

The stem of '*pithā*' is 'pithru', of '*māthā-māthru*'. '*Śarma*', 'Varma' and 'Gupta' represent the Brahmin, Kshathriya and Vaisya castes. The stems of the first two words are '*Śarman*' and 'Varman'. 'Gupta' ends in a short 'a'. 'Sakha' (friend), masculine gender, does not end in 'a' in its stem form; interestingly enough its stem is 'sakhi', 'i'-ending.

Men are usually taller than women. However, in the matter of names, feminine ones end in a long 'a', while masculine ones end in a short 'a'. Here we see women are elevated above men.

As mentioned before, feminine names ending in 'i' or 'ī' predominate. The name '*Śakthi*' itself ends in 'i', while '*Dēvi*' and 'Isvari' end in 'i'; '*Ambā*' and '*Ambikā*' end in a long 'ā'.

Names ending in 'ā' are exclusively those of women. However 'ī-kāra' and 'i-kara' are said to personify *Śakthi*. The mystery of this is known to people learned in manthras. It is to be cherished as a secret and unparted only to the deserving, those entitled to know it. To put it briefly, 'i' it is that imbues each and everyone with life (and gives them the light of knowledge.)

I began by telling you that in the very first syllable 'Si' of *Śiva Ambāl* is inseparably conjoined to the name as 'i-kara' breathing life into the god so named.

What will happen if the 'i' in 'Śiva' is dropped? As a masculine name if this 'i' in it were changed to a-kara, what would be the result? 'Śiva', the most auspicious of names, would become 'sāva', denoting the most inauspicious. 'Si' minus 'i' is 's(al)'. Does not 'Śiva' then become 'sava' (corpse)? It is the vowel 'i' that imparts life to *Īśvarā*. So if it is dropped?

In this context I have found another thing. In the name 'Īśvarā', 'i' is the initial letter. In *Vēdhanthā*, *Īśvarā* denotes the Brahman with attributes, the functioning Brahman. All functions, all activity, originate from 'i', the bījā representing *Śakthi*. *Bijā* means seed and just as an entire tree is potentially present or hidden in a small seed, a bija or a bījākshara encapsulates the power of a great mantra.

Let us view the concept that *Śiva* is *sava* if not united with *Śakthi*, in the light of the Tamil tradition in which sounds or phonemes have beautiful names. In the *Prāṇavā* of *Śiva-Śakthi* there is 'i'. I said this letter stood for *Ambāl*. I also observed that 'i' in the Tamil language is a letter with life (vowel); joined to it is the phonetic or sonic form of *Īśvarā* which is a 'corporal' letter (consonant). So in the *Prāṇava* of *Śiva-Śakthi* *Śiva* is the body (consonant) and *Ambāl* is the life (vowel). What is *Śiva* minus 'i'? We have already seen the answer.

What do we mean when we say that *Śiva* is sava without *Śakthi*? Without the mistress of the household the husband cannot do anything; he is powerless. Earlier I referred to certain colloquial usages in Tamil. For example, 'If you have the *Śakthi* for it, go and do it. Or else keep quiet like *Śiva*.' Does it not mean that without 'her', he has nothing to do, he can do nothing? Whoever it be, if he loses his *Śakthi* (energy) he will be incapable of doing anything. To the Brahman that is *Śiva* also it is the same if not conjoined with *Śakthi*.

It is because the Brahman is aware of its *Śakthi* that it performs - and is able to perform - the function of creation with it. Is it not *Śakthi* herself who makes it aware that it has *Śakthi*? This is what is said in the first stanza of the hymn: '*Śiva* becomes capable of performing his cosmic function only when he is united with you who is *Śakthi*. Otherwise he will not be able to stir even.' This idea is affirmed by adding the words; 'Na khalu' (Is it not so?).

*Śivah Śakthyā yukthō yadhi bhavathi Śāktah prabhavithum
Na chēdhēvam dēvō na khalu kusalah spandhithum api*

'Spandhithum api' (even to stir or move); 'kusalah na khalu' (not able, is it not so?'). Without *Śakthi*, *Śiva* has to remain as sava.

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ĀCHĀRYĀ FOR BOTH PATHS

'There must be no cosmos; the phenomenal or empirical world is *Māyā*. One must become the Truth that is *Śivam*, the Brahman that is quiescent and without attributes.' Such is the doctrine that the *Āchāryā* has established and taught through his various commentaries and original works. What was important to him, his goal, was the unconditioned, quiescent Brahman. The idea of the *Śakthi* that activates this Brahman he attacked bitterly

and refuted it as *Māyā*. However, in the hymn, he extols the same *Śakthi* thus: 'Without you how can *Śiva* exercise his power?' He takes delight in the fact that *Śakthi* energises *Śiva* and thereby the affairs of the world are conducted. 'It is all your work, rather', he exclaims.

Can the same person speak thus in two different ways? Which of the two is the truth? Should the *Āchāryā* have spoken in two different voices? Both ways in fact represent the Truth.

Logically both cannot be the Truth. However, the attributes of truth are always not logically determined. Whatever is dear to you and are good for you must be treated as the truth. The *Āchāryā* divides into two categories: those capable of taking the path of *jñāna* and those taking the path of devotion. The former he instructs in the way suited to them by writing works on Adhvaitha. And for the latter he has composed hymns like the *Saundaryalaharī* to help *them* bring about spiritual betterment. He exhorts such as those who are in a mature stage and who make efforts to see the One Entity that is the root of all to reject the universe divided as it is multifariously. He also exhorts them to reject the body, senses and the mind that experience sorrow and happiness from the same and teaches them how to become absorbed in the quiescent Root of all. This is the path of *jñāna*.

There are people who cannot all at once do away with worldly matters and are not mature enough to reach the state of *jñāna*. The *Āchāryā* shows them the path of devotion and he does so regarding it as a way for them to become mature. He is anxious that, since they cannot in their present state give up their worldly outlook and their involvement in the affairs of the senses and the mind, they should not for that reason be forgetful of the Root, the Reality, and make their life futile by becoming trapped in sensual pleasures, sorrow and fear. He shows them that all worldly affairs, worldly phenomena, are ruled by that serene Root, manifested as

Īśvarā conjoined with *Śakthi*. He further teaches them to view all these as *Īśvarā*'s sport and exhorts them to involve their minds, senses, etc, in meditating upon him, in worshipping him, in listening to narrations of his doings and in singing his glory. If, in this manner, the functioning Brahman (*Īśvarā*) is grasped through the very phenomenal world of the mind and the senses, one would become fit by the Lord's grace, by forsaking these very things [the phenomenal world, the mind and the senses], to reach the stage of the causative functionless Brahman.

When a thin, skinny child throws up tantrums and refuses to eat, what does its mother do? She speaks kindly to it, tells it stories, takes it to the backyard to show it the crow perched on the branch of a tree, and feeds it dainty morsels of food. The mother, let us suppose, has one more child which suffers from indigestion. She speaks even more lovingly to it and feeds it with gruel which is good for it. Would you say the mother treats her two children differently, that she is not truthful in what she does?

We have, on the one hand, *Īśvarā* who creates the phenomenal world and all creatures and keeps them under his sway and, on the other, we have the individual (the individual Self) with a mind and senses: that there are thus two entities is a truth. When we inquire into the question of who or what the primary cause of all this is or what the root of all this is we find that it is all the sport, the *Māyā* (the jugglery), of an entity that is by itself, and at the same time doing nothing. And this is also a truth.

Whatever the path followed by people, they must become sincerely involved in it. When they have not developed the required maturity for this, they must not be distracted from it and lose their one-pointedness.

It is not enough to say that the *Āchāryā* teaches people in two ways according to their different mental dispositions. The two different ways in which he imparts his teaching must be regarded

as the Truth in two different stages of mind. It is for this reason that when one system is extolled, it may become necessary to do so at the expense of another. So, instead of subjecting the different ways or systems to criticism based on logic, they must be approached on the basis of psychology which does not come under logic, taking into account the differences in outlook of people and their fitness for or entitlement to a particular system. So when a way is to be shown for the advancement of an individual it may become necessary to show one system as being higher than another - this fact must be appreciated.

When a mother administers a bitter medicine to her thin and skinny child telling it that it tastes sweet, is she speaking a lie? No, she is telling the truth. Another child suffering from diarrhoea wants to eat a *sweet* but its mother tells it that it is something bitter and stops it from eating it. Is she not now also telling the truth? What is truth? The criterion in judging whether or not something is a truth is that it must be good to others. But what is beneficial to some must not be harmful to some others. Which means that what we consider truthful must not harm to anybody. Also one's own selfish interest, and one's personal gain must have no place in it. People for whose well-being a system is being expounded must accept it as something that they like; they must be able to follow it without difficulty.

It is with this good intention that one system is elevated and another lowered in relation to it. The purpose is not to show that the latter is in fact worthless. The real idea behind elevating a system over another is that the individual who receives instruction in it will appreciate that it is the one that is meant for him. When he finds that it is the one best suited to him he will follow it with interest, solely concentrating on it.

Also the purpose of showing another system in a poor light is to dissuade him from plunging into it and thereby becoming

confused. For an individual with a different outlook, and belonging to a different culture, it may be necessary to speak depreciatingly of what is exalted in the case of the first one and what is rejected in the case of the latter may have to be presented as the best in the case of the first individual. We see the same with regard to the *Purāṇās* and devotional works. While dealing with a particular god, he is depicted as being superior to all other gods.

It is in keeping with this logic that the *Āchāryā* asks you to hold in devotion the very thing he asks you to reject as an Adhvaithi. What he condemns while he speaks on Adhvaitha as *Māyā* is for those who do not have to be devout, those for whom it is not necessary to follow the path of bhakti. If a man wants to be a devotee he has necessarily to feel that he is separate, even if it be to the smallest degree, from the object of his adoration, that is God. In Adhvaitha *jñāna* there is no such separation, not even to the least degree, and there is only oneness. And those who are capable of following this path have no need to be devoted in the manner or sense we think. In their case the *Āchāryā* says that contemplation of one's true being or nature is bhakti- *svasvarūpānusandhānam*'. But there are very, very few who are capable of such bhakti.

How about us, the majority of us? We go along the way our mind takes us and the way our senses drag us, without making any distinction between right and wrong and indeed committing wrongs thinking that what keeps us happy must be right. We will learn to be humble and devout and to be without fear and we will be less prone to do wrongs, or commit sins, if we are taught that there is a *Śakti* that governs even deities like Brahma, that this *Parāśakti* can even move the Brahman. 'The quiescent *Śivam*, without any function, is the Truth. As far as it is concerned, there is neither right nor wrong, neither anything just nor anything unjust, neither is there merit nor demerit. All that we see is *Māyā*. That Truth (*Śivam*) is not connected with anything [being Absolute]. It neither punishes nor blesses.'

If we speak thus in a non-dualistic manner, we may take a perverse view of it and act according to the dictates of our mind, as if we had the freedom and licence to do anything we like. That is why at the very commencement of the hymn the *Āchāryā* teaches us to erase our ego-sense: he proclaims that there is *Ambāl*, the Great Power, to activate *Śivam* (the unconditioned Brahman), *Ambāl*, who is worshipped by the Trinity-*Vishṇu*, Rudra and Brahma. The *Āchāryā* says '*Hariharavirinichādhibirapi ārādhyām*'. We do not have the energy even to think that we can prostrate ourselves before her or sing her praises. Even to pray to her, to sing her glory, we must be the recipients of her grace. For that we must live in accordance with dharma; we must be just and devout-such a meaning is implied in the first verse.

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PANCHAKRUTHYA AND KĀMEŚVARĪ AND KĀMEŚVARA

'Hari-Hara-Virincha': these are the names given by the *Āchāryā* for the gods who constitute the Thrimurthi. And these three, he says, worship *Ambāl*. Before this he observes: 'Even *Śiva* can stir - that is he is able to conduct the affairs of the universe - only when he is united with you. So does it not mean that the 'Hara' of the Thrimurthi is one and the '*Śiva*' mentioned at first (in the very first stanza) is another?

Leave aside the concept that all is one. The non-dualistic doctrine has no place here. Is that not how the hymn has come to be composed? In the state in which all are one inwardly and are separate outwardly, Hara and *Śiva* are different.

'Hara' means 'one who destroys', 'one who annihilates'. It occurs in the compound words '*apaharaṇa*' and '*samharaṇa*'. It takes the form of '*hāra*' - '*apahara*' and '*samhāra*'. Brahma creates, *Vishṇu* sustains, Rudra destroys. 'Hara' means 'Rudra' the destroyer.

It is the one and only *Paramātmā* that divides Itself into three deities to perform three different functions. Their power to perform these functions is derived from the root *Śakthi* of the *Paramātmā*. That root *Śakthi* is *Ambāl*. She is the power of the *Parabrahmam* that is called the *Paramātmā*. 'It is not only the three Murthis (the Thrimurthi) who derive energy from you but all living beings, including flies and ants. She is also the power latent in all inanimate objects.'

The *Śakthi* of the *Parabrahmam* must be the *Parabrahmam* Itself. A thing is a thing by virtue of its power. If it loses its power it becomes useless. When you say that a motor-car has a ten-horsepower engine, it is the horsepower that makes a car a car. An individual remains an individual because of *Śakthi*. Therefore what is called '*Parabrahma-Śakthi*' is the *Parabrahmam*. However, anyone, whoever it be, can also remain doing nothing, without showing his *Śakthi*, his power or strength. '*Śivam*' is to be understood in this manner, the *Parabrahmam* being by Itself in quietude, without any outward movement.

It is from this state of *Śivam* that we have emerged as individual beings with our mind turned to outward activities and our senses involved in outward objects. When do we realise our true state? When do we become freed from the ties of *Māyā* and the bondage of worldly existence? The answer is when we become inseparably dissolved in *Śivam*. Since the liberation that gives us beatitude of the highest order is a state of tranquillity, the *Brahmam* in which we are inseparably dissolved must also be quiescent and serene and not manifesting its *Śakthi* (power). That is why when we speak of the *Brahmam* or the *Parabrahmam* we refer to an entity that does not 'work' or is not active. Don't we speak of a madman with a vacant look sitting in a corner doing nothing thus, 'It is like the *Brahmam*' [note the neuter gender used for a man].

Looked at in this manner there is reason to speak separately of the two: *Śiva* is the *Parabrahmam* and that *Ambāl* is *Parabrahma-Śakthi*, though the one does not exist without the other.

Now, apart from the three functions [creation, sustenance and action] carried out through *Brahma-Śakthi*, there are two more to be added. From the state of the serene *Śivam* how have we been brought to the condition in which we have no awareness of the true original form of ours? It is through *Brahma-Sakthi* that it has been done. She it is who has concealed our awareness of our true form and created nescience in individuals and pushed us into the *Māyā* realm of worldly existence. Many great men have escaped or been freed from the snare of *Māyā*. They have attained their true form of awareness of the quiescent *Śivam* becoming absorbed in the eternal tranquil state of *mōksha*. From this, we understand that *Parāśakthi-Brahma-Śakthi* performs the function of granting us liberation through her grace. Thus two more functions are added to those of creation, sustenance and destruction. Of the two, the first is to conceal from us our awareness of our true Self with the power of *Māyā*. The second, to free us from the trap of *Māyā* and bless us with liberation, that is unite us with the *Paramātmā*.

The two functions mentioned above are called '*thirōdhāna*' and '*anugraha*'. The first is also called '*thirobhāva*'. The root '*thiras*' means 'to conceal', to veil, 'to make a secret of'. You must have heard of the art called '*thiraskariṇi*' in which objects are concealed or made to disappear. It is the work of *Parāśakthi* to veil our real Self with the curtain of *Māyā* and consign us to worldly existence : this is called '*thiroadhāna*'. The function of raising the curtain and granting final release is *anugraha*. Just as *Parāśakthi* has appointed *Brahma*, *Vishṇu* and *Rudra* for creation, protection and dissolution, she has appointed *Īśvarā*, who is also called *Mahēśvara*, for *thiroadhāna*. The first three functions come within

the sphere of *Māyā*. The entire conduct of the world of *Māyā* is in the hands of *Īśvarā*. Dispelling *Māyā* and granting the anugraha of liberation is the function of *Sadāśivā*.

The five functions are called 'Panchakruthya'. They form part of *Śaiva* systems like *Śaiva-Siddhānta* also. In *Śaivism* Panchakruthya is performed by *Paramaśiva*. The dance of Nataraja is called '*Panchakruthya-paramānanda-thāndava*'. In the *ākthā* discipline, Panchakruthya is the work of *Ambāl*. In the 'One Thousand Names of *Lalithā*' she is called '*Panchakruthya-parāyaṇā*'.

Ambāl, as the 'chief authority', appoints other 'authorities' under her to perform the Panchakruthya. It is not only because our subject is a *Śākthā* hymn that we should think so. Even viewed impartially we will realise the appropriateness of *Ambāl* being the chief authority for the five functions. A 'kruthya' or 'kārya' - something that is to be done or carried out - necessarily means the use of *Śakthi*. Is not *Śakthi Ambāl*? In the *Śaiva* doctrine also it is mentioned that *Śiva* is with *Śakthi*. That is *Śiva*'s wife is called *Śakthi* and he is together with her. In Kashmira *Śaivism*, which is very close to the non-dualistic system and to the ideas expressed in the *Saundaryalaharī*, the *Paramātmā* occupying the highest plane is referred to as '*Śiva-Śakthi*'. So when it comes to Panchakruthya it is fitting that it is brought under *Ambāl*, that is *Parāśakthi*. And Panchakruthya is not the same as speaking of the concept of experiencing the inner quietude of *samādhi*.

If *Ambāl* performs the functions of Panchakruthya through five different deities, it means that she is higher than they are. Have not these five powers sprung from the power that is full of the *Parabrahmam*? It follows that it must be higher than everything else.

That Root of this power is the subject of our hymn, *Sundarī*. She is however the power that is the basis of all happenings, all

action. She is the mistress of all the five deities. She is indeed higher than *Sadāśivā* who grants liberation. When he is in the form of *jnāna*, he is, as they say, 'just' Being, not doing. When he is by himself he has nothing above or below him. But when he is engaged in performing a function - when he performs the function of granting *jnāna* - the power that makes him do so must be higher than what he is.

To those accomplished in manthra *sāsthā*, siddhas, and to realised devotees she has given *dharṣan* in her gross form [that is in her physical form], seated above the five deities [those who perform the five functions]. She appears as *Rājarājēsvari* in royal splendour. And what is her seat? Its four legs are Brahma, *Vishṇu*, Rudra and Mahēsvara. The seat proper which connects the four legs is *Sadāśivā*,

Ambāl who has for her seat Brahma and others who perform kruthya, *Ambāl* that is absolute *Brahma-Sakthi*, is known as Kamēsvari. In this form of hers, the *Parabrahmam*, her consort, is called Kamēsvara.

When she is responsible for all functions, all cosmic activities, why should there be a husband for her, an entity called Kamēsvara?'

Although she is all and everything, when she is *Śrīvidhya* - among the various forms of hers - her chief aspect is that of Mother. Like a child going to its mother in affection, all of us have to love her with devotion. And though she is *Mahāsakthi* she assumes a form in which what it is manifested is her beauty and loveliness rather than her power. That is why we see that her very first name in 'The One Thousand Names' is '*Śrīmāthā*'. She creates us, protects us and, in between births, gives us a rest by destroying us. She sports with the veil of *Māyā* and, finally, the Mother that she is, she makes us one with her by granting us liberation. When she plays the part of Mother, there must perforce be a Father on

the scene. Mother without Father... Can we think of the World Mother in two different ways? She is the young maiden goddess *Bālā* and *Kanyākumārī* - but that is a different matter. So also is the case of *Durgā* who appeared to subdue the demonic powers. *Ambālī* is primarily Mother, *Śrīmāthā*. So there must be a Father to go with her. That is why we have *Kāmēśvara* as husband [for *Kāmēśvari*] and that is why again, in keeping with worldly dharma, he is accorded a very high place. The *Lalithā-Thrīśathī* mentions fifteen names of the goddess as the wife of *Kāmēśvara*.

Though she is known by the names of *Rājarājēśvari*, *Lalithā*, *Thripurasundari* and so on, her name of *Kāmēśvari* is of special importance. Just as in *Śaivism* *Śiva* is mentioned as being with *Śakthi*, so in the *Śāktha* system - and in the *Śrīvidhya* *thanthra* - she, that is *Śakthi*, is referred to as being with her husband *Śiva*. Who can be the husband of *Brahma-Śakthi* that is full and undivided? When there exists nothing other than *Brahmaśakthi* who can be her husband? When you give some thought to the question you will realise that *Śiva* alone can be her husband; *Śiva* who does not manifest his power, *Śiva* who is the quiescent and serene Brahman, *Śiva* who appears to be different from that *Śakthi*. This means that the power of the quiescent *Śiva* is manifested through his wife who is responsible for the *Panchakruthya*. It also emerges that *Śiva* here, though he does not reveal the splendour of his power directly and does not perform any *function*, desires to reveal his power (or perform functions).

The *Thaithirīya Upanishad* says: 'The One Brahman desires to become many.' If the quiescent Brahman becomes the active Brahman, it means that it must have had the desire to be that, the functioning Brahman - is that not so? 'Desired' - '*akāmayata*' - is the word used in the Upanishad itself. The Brahman or *Śivam* in which the power of *jñāna* is always inherent wants to manifest its power - *Brahma-Śiva-Śakthi* - and conduct the sport of the affairs of the world. This is called '*Ichhāśakthi*', the power of desire. Then

what actually performs the sport of Panchakruthya is 'kriyāśakthi'. Our present concern is that when the Brahman, which is by Itself, turns outward it is desire that occurs to it first. The Upanishad calls it 'kāma'. The word does not yield any unsavoury meaning. It means here pure desire [desire that has nothing to do with carnal urges]. *Kāma* first arose from the Brahman, from *Brahma-Śakthi* that is full and entire, and it is the first to arise from it as something different from it. It is the same *Kāma* that takes the place of his wife. The cosmic sport is the result of the quiescent Brahman, that is *Śiva* uniting with *icchāśakthi*, like father and mother uniting to give rise to praja, offspring, and the Panchakruthya is also a result of it. So the two become husband and wife. It is because *Ambāl* is the personification of his desire or *Kāma* that she becomes *Kāmēśvari*.

That [*Kāmēśvari*] is the first name. Since the first evolute of the *Parabrahman* is *kāma*, the one named after it, *Kāmēśvari*, must be the prime name of the *Brahma-Śakthi*. He who had desire is *Kāmēśvara*. He who was *Parabrahman* alone did no more than manifest his desire. The one who translates that desire into action and conducts the cosmic sport Panchakruthya is entirely *Śakthi*. She, that is *Kāmēśvari* is like an empress, with sovereign authority. *Śakthi* is the one who rules over all the worlds, all creatures and the celestials. The wife of a reigning king cannot be a queen in the real sense. A queen is one who rules on her own. In the 'One Thousand Names of *Lalithā*', the very first name of *Śrīmathā*. (what we affectionately call 'Mother') is followed by two names which show that the goddess is the universal monarch, the queen-empress, holding authority over all the worlds. The two names: '*ŚrīMaharājñi*' and '*Srīmat Simhāsanēśvari*'.

Being seated on the throne, on the *simhāsana*, is one aspect. But, then, all kings and queens sit on their thrones. What is noteworthy with regard to *Ambāl* is that, as I have already told you, she has a special throne, the '*PanchaBrahmāsana*'. I further

mentioned that seated on it as *Kāmēśvari*, that she is not alone on it and is with *Kāmēswara*. She is in fact seated on his lap, on the lap of *Kāmēswara*, on *PanchaBrahmāsana*. So he too becomes her seat.

Kāma was the first to emerge from the *Parabrahmam* necessarily for cosmic sport. So *Kāmēswara* and *Kāmēśvari* are the names first given to the primordial couple.

Though she is called *Lalithāmbāl*, he is not correspondingly called *Lalithēswara*. *Lalithā* means tender, delicate, soft. Only she, being feminine, can be so, not he. Similarly, though she is called, '*Rājarājēśvari*' he is not called '*Rājarājēśvara*'. There is '*Rājarājēśvaram*' in Thanjavur, but the name is derived from the king (*Rajarāja Chōla*) who built the temple in Thanjavur. The temple itself is named '*Bruhadhīśvarām*' after the name of its deity. There is no *Rajarājēśvara* to pair with *Rajarājēśvara* because she alone has the authority to rule—she is the real *Mahārajnī*. The husband of the maharajni is like Albert, the consort of Queen Victoria, or Philip, the consort of Queen Elizabeth II. But this comparison is not exact. Queen Victoria was subject to Parliament as is the present Queen Elizabeth. *Rajarājēśvari* is a completely independent authority, wielding sovereign power.

Ambāl is the ruling authority, the sovereign queen that is why she is called '*Rajarājēśvari*'. Her consort does not have the authority to rule, so it is not proper to call him '*Rajarājēśvara*'. '*Thripurasundari*' is another important name of hers. As I have told you she is the subject of the *Saundaryalaharī*. There is no '*Thripurasundara*' to pair with '*Thripurasundari*'. *Thripurasundari* is a beauty beyond compare; there is none as beautiful as she is in all the three worlds. *Siva's* beauty does not compare with hers; that is why he is not called '*Thripurasundara*'. Having said that she is foremost in beauty, how can he too be said to be the same? . However attractive he is to look at he can only be second to her in beauty. That is why he is not called '*Thripurasundara*'.

Two are obviously needed for desire to arise, desire for each other; so we have *Kāmēśvara* and *Kāmēśvari*, the beautiful pair. Seated on the *PanchaBrahmāsana*, she, who is the power entire of the *Parabrahmam*, and called *Kāmēśvari* because she is linked to the desire: outwardly manifested by the *Parabrahmam*, conducts her sport, the cosmic drama of creation, with her husband *Kāmēśvara*.

It is for the purpose of the creation of the world and the conduct of its affairs that the *Panchakruthya* is performed. It is all because *Kāmēśvari* desires to be revealed in many different forms and it is on account of the *kāma* or desire of hers that she is called *Kāmēśvari*. She desires to make herself many, multifarious, and make these many entities separate from herself through *Māyā*. 'Can there be such a desire? And is it not a cruel desire?' If you ask thus, the answer is: 'It is not so.' In the end, may be after many yugas or kalpas (one-seventh of the life span of *Parabrahmam*), it is *Ambāl*'s intent to bring together all those separated and absorb them in herself as one. There is greater joy in coming together again after being separated for long. If someone has been staying long with us there is not much affection between him and us. But if he is separated from us, goes to another place or another country and returns after a long period, we feel greater affection for him; and he too, for the same reason, feels greater affection for us. We must view *Ambāl*'s desire similarly. She makes herself us (that is *Ambāl* divides herself into many and keeps them all separate entities) and pushes us into *Māyā* and later, out of her great love, makes them (us) all one (with her). It is all for the greater joy that is derived from the reunion. Does not a mother love to play hide and seek with her child?

The waters of the ocean evaporate and in the form of clouds travel a hundred, two hundred, miles, condense into rain which falls on earth; the rain water becomes a river which meanders

through the land and finally falls into mother ocean that had given it birth.

Kāmēsvari, who is with *Kāmeśvara*, is seated on the *PanchaBrahmāsana*. The *Brahmam* and its *Śakthi* entire, particularly the *Śakthi* entire that is in the form of desire, are above everything. It is from this pair that the *Panchakruthya*, the cosmic drama of creation and so on, are enacted.

When the same concept is manifested in a gross form, *Kāmēsvari* is seated on the left side of the lap of *Kāmeśvara* on the *PanchaBrahmāsana* and the two face east. In keeping with it, the leg in south-east (the cardinal point of *Agni*) is *Brahma*; the leg in south-west (the cardinal point of *Nirruṭhi*) is *Vishṇu*; the leg in north-west (the cardinal point of *Vāyu*) is *Rudra*; and the leg in north-east (the cardinal point of *Īśāna*) is appropriately enough *Isvara*. The seat joining the legs together is *Sadāśivā*. *Brahma-Śakthi* derived from *Brahma-Śakthi* is divided by *Brahma-Śakthi* into the five functions performed by the five deities. They are called *Panchabrahma* and the seat made up by them is *PanchaBrahmāsana*.

Contrary to the name 'Brahma' suggesting a high position, each of the five is also called by a name that might sound scary to you : it is 'prētha' or 'corpse.' The *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*, which includes the name, '*PanchaBrahmāsanaasthitā*', has also these names, '*Panchaprethasanāsīnā*' and '*Panchaprethaman-chādhisāyini*'. The idea is that if *Ambālī* were not to give the five deities the power to perform their five respective functions they would be no better than corpses, like a car that has lost its horsepower, like a fused bulb.

For *Kāmēsvara* also she is the life-breath. There is a name illustrating this, '*Kāmēsvara-prāṇa-nādi*' : this name we find both in the *Lalitha Sahasranāmam* and in the *Thrisathī*. However, keeping worldly dharma in view, according to which a woman's

greatness lies in being together with her husband, *Parāśakthi*, despite her great strength, remains with *Kāmēśvara* who occupies a higher place.

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ŚIVA AND HARA

‘For *Śiva* to be able even to stir he must be united with you. Union with you has such glory. And such a one as you Hara worships,’ thus speaks the *Āchāryā* addressing *Ambāl*. He mentions two, *Śiva* and Hara. The first is able to stir only because of his being with *Ambāl*; the second pays obeisance to her.

Why are two names mentioned, *Śiva* and Hara? How are the two different in the duties they perform?

Śiva, about whom no more is said than that he stirs (only because of his being with *Śakthi*), is the primary principle, the *Parabrahmam*, mentioned by the *Śāktha* and *Śaiva* systems. He is *Kāmēśvara*, the husband of *Kāmēśvari*, the one seated on the *PanchaBrahmāsana*. Since he is *Ambāl*’s husband he is not said to adore her or prostrate himself before her. The reason for this is not only the place he occupies. Knowing himself and then desiring to manifest himself outwardly: beyond this he is not capable of anything. *Ambāl* who is always with him as ‘*Chithsakthi*’, the power of *jnāna*, did no more than involve him in *icchāśakthi* (the power of desire). She did not impart him *kriyāśakthi* (the power of doing) and involve him in the performance of any deed. For it (the performance of functions with *kriyāśakthi*) she created the Panchakruthya deities. *Śiva* does not know any outward function, nor can he perform any such function. So there is no question of his worshipping *Ambāl* or of prostrating himself before her. The ‘wave’ of desire was created in him, that is in one who was like the still ocean of tranquillity that does not break into waves. But when there was a wave in the ocean which had been like a vast sheet of

metal there occurred a movement. Without the agency of some power (a driving force) how can there be any movement? So it means he was now with *Śakthi*.

'Hara' is the same as the 'Rudra' among the panchakruthya deities and his function is destruction. The *Āchāryā* has made this clear by putting his name along with those of Hari and Virincha (*Vishṇu* and *Brahma*): 'Hari Hara-Virinchādhībīh.'

In *Śaiva-Siddhāntā*, Hara denotes *Śiva*, the Absolute: the two are spoken of equally highly. Not only that, from time immemorial the custom has existed throughout the country of what is called raising the chant of '*Puṇḍarikam*' to *Śiva*. A group of devotees chant in chorus, '*Hara-Hara-Mahādeva*'. In Tamil Nadu the chant becomes '*Arōharā*'.

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'PUNDARIKAM' 'NĀMAM'

I said 'raising the chant of *Puṇḍarikam*'. From the context in which I said it you must have understood that it means a group of people chanting the names of the Lord in chorus. Why should chanting or singing the names of the Lord by a devout group be called 'raising the chant of *Puṇḍarikam*'. Two reasons occur to me - but I am merely guessing.

Where do you find, more than anywhere else, groups and groups of devotees chanting the names of the Lord? At Pandharipuram (Pandharpur, Maharashtra). Here the chant of the devotees, '*Jai jai Vithal*' fills the air. After the devotees conclude chanting a string of names, the crowd of worshippers say aloud: '*Jai Puṇḍarīka Varada! Hari Vithal!*' After Maharashtrians had established their rule in Thanjavur, their *Harikathā*, *Lāvaṇī*, etc. gained popularity in these parts. Their influence was felt in the conduct of our *bhajans* also. In the group chanting of the Lord's names, the words '*Jai Puṇḍarīka Varada*' were now added. The

very fact that the words were newly added to their *bhajans* was a reason why they made a deep impression on the minds of the devotees here. The result: whatever the god or goddess whose names were sung the term '*Puṇḍarikam*' came to be applied to the concluding part of the *bhajan*. In the case of *Śiva* it was '*Namah Pārvathī-pathayē-Hara-Hara-Mahādēva!*' and in the case of *Sri Krishṇā* it was '*Gopikājīvana-smaraṇam-Govinda, Govinda!*'

The habit of drinking tea has existed in China for a very very long time. When Europeans came to Asia as traders and conquerors they learned about tea and introduced it into Europe. Especially because it was a new beverage, tea gained in popularity among Englishmen particularly. Any occasion on which light refreshments were served came to be called a tea - party, even if tea was not served in it. In the same way, in the *bhajans* entirely devoted to *Śiva*, the chant, '*Namah Pārvathī-pathayē - Hara-Hara-Mahādēva!*', came to be called '*Puṇḍarikam*'.

Another reason also occurs to me. '*Puṇḍarīka*' means 'lotus'. Chidambaram which is the *hrudaya-kamala* (heart-lotus) of the universe is called '*Puṇḍarikapura*'. The term '*hrudh-Puṇḍarīka*' occurs in the *Śāstrhās*. We know the lotus-eyed *Krishṇā* as '*Puṇḍarīkāsha*'.

But why should the chanting of the '*nāmam*' of the Lord by a group of devotees be called '*Puṇḍarikam*'?

'*Nāmam*' of course means 'name'. The mark applied to the forehead by *Vaiṣṇavas* is called *nāmam*. Why? As they apply the mark to the different parts of their body, *Vaiṣṇavas* chant twelve names of *Vishṇu* - *Kēśava*, *Nārāyaṇā*, *Mādhava* and so on. Since the rite is accompanied by the chanting of the names of *Vishṇu* as a manthra it came to be called '*nāmam*': it is similar to the gold coin with the effigy of the sovereign itself being called 'sovereign'.

In the beginning, the sacred mark on the forehead resembled a lotus or a lotus petal. Don't we call such a mark 'thilaka'?

‘Thilaka’ means ‘thila’ or a sesame seed. Is not a lotus petal shaped like a sesame seed?

‘Thilaka’ is an adornment, that is a mark meant to beautify (the face). To purify the body, according to the rules laid down in the *Śāsthṛās*, people applied the sacred ashes (vibhūthi) to the forehead (and other parts of the body) in the form of three stripes. To enhance their appearance and as a perfume they applied sandal-paste in the shape of a lotus petal to the forehead. The mark according to the *Sasthras* is, however, vibhuti. In course of time, as different religious sects appeared, different sacred marks also came into use. A change occurred with regard to the wearing of ashes also as required by the *Śāsthṛās*. Women, among a section of *Smārthas*, gave up wearing ashes and, instead, began wearing what is called ‘gopi-chandanam’ (a kind of clay made into a paste) not as stripes but as a mark resembling the lotus in shape. When the two sects, *Smārthas* and *Vaishṇavas*, became differentiated, the latter began wearing the *nāmam* with *thiruman*. If you look at a *nāmam* closely you will find that it too is basically shaped like a lotus. *Vaishṇavas* call it the mark of the sacred feet of ‘Perumāḷ’, that is *Vishṇu*. Is not the sacred *pādha* (foot) of the Lord called ‘Lotus’?

I said that one of the names of the lotus is ‘pundarīka’. People often say ‘pundram’ for ‘pundarīka’. Some sections of people gave up totally the practice of wearing ashes in the form of the three stripes and took to wearing the *gopi* or *thiruman* not only to bedeck themselves but also as a mark in keeping with the *Śāsthṛās* pertaining to their sects. Since then all sacred marks applied to the forehead, including the wearing of ashes in the form of the three stripes, have come to be called ‘*Puṇḍram*’. The stripes do not resemble the lotus even remotely but they came to be known as ‘*thripundram*’ and the marks like *gopi* and *thiruman* worn vertically came to be called ‘*ūrdhva-pundram*’. Any new movement, as it becomes more and more active, is likely to attract the attention of all. Similarly, when *Vaishṇavas* emerged as a

considerably big group with an independent tradition and became active, their separate rites and observances should have attracted wide attention. So the '*Puṇḍram*' they wore must have been adopted as the name of all marks worn on the forehead.

Now, interestingly enough, the wheel has come full circle : what was up is now down. Did not the mark on the forehead applied with the chanting of the names of the Lord come to be called '*nāmam*'? Did not the same mark also have the name of '*puṇḍram*' and '*puṇḍarika*'? That is '*nāmam*' came to be equated with the '*puṇḍram*'. The distinction between the *nāmam* on the forehead and the *nāmam* meaning the name(s) of the Lord must have been lost. And *pundram* must have acquired the meaning of the names of the Lord. When *Vaiṣṇavas* formed into groups and went from place to place to propagate their faith, they must have chanted aloud, 'Govinda! Govinda!' This practice of raising the chant of the names of Bhagavan must have got the name of '*pundram*'! In course of time the term must have been applied to chanting the names of any god, whether *Śiva* or some other deity.

I said we raise the chant of '*Puṇḍarikam*' with *Hara Hara Mahadeva*! 'It is because the name of Hara is regarded as important as that of *Śiva*: In this hymn (the *Saundaryalaharī*) the *Āchāryā* has it that Hara is Rudra, the one who has the function of dissolution. He who was given the power of carrying out this function by *Ambālī* pays obeisance to her along with Brahma and *Vishṇu*: '*Athasthvām ārādhyām Hariharavirinchādhibbhih.*'

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ŚIVA'S SPANDHANA OR VIBRATION

Ambālī has urged Rudra, that is Hara, to perform the function of destruction. But *Śiva*, who is the Brahman, she has just made to stir. The word '*spandhana*' occurs in the first stanza of the hymn in the form, '*spandhithum*', to pulsate. The *Parabrahman* was like a

calm lake which is not disturbed even by a ripple. Now this spandhana was the first wave, the first pulsation, in the *Parabrahma-Śiva* and it was an outward manifestation of desire, that is *icchā* or *kāma*.

True, the first pulsation was desire. If pulsation is created in the quiescent *Śiva*, if an act like desiring is caused in the actionless *Śiva*, it has to be through some power or *Śakthi*. It is not merely that the Chitha *śakthi*, the power of *jñāna*, inhering in the *Parabrahmam*, divided itself into *Ichhāśakthi* and *kriyāśakthi*, the power of desire and the power of creation. The arousal of desire in the *Brahmam* itself is an act for which *Ambāl* or *Śakthi* has been instrumental.

To go deep into the fundamentals. If one has a desire one must, to start with, have an awareness that one exists. In sound sleep we have no awareness of our existence. Does any desire arise in us then? Let us suppose we faint or we have been rendered unconscious by the administration of an anaesthetic. Do we have anything like desire at this time? So if the *Brahmam* came to have any desire it must have had, to start with, an awareness of its own existence. For the *Brahmam*, that is by itself, to be aware of itself, to have knowledge of itself that 'I, the *Brahmam*, exist' is also an act. Is it not the ripple that occurred in the serene lake before the desire was aroused in it? It could not have been accomplished without the prodding of *Śakthi*. It was *Śakthi* that made *Śiva* aware of his existence. Such awareness on the part of *Śiva*--that 'I am,' the experience of 'I' - is called '*parāhanthā*'. Do we not describe our own I-feeling as '*ahanthā*'? The Self believing that the body and inner organs, that are false and separate from it, as constituting its true form is '*ahanthā*'. The Supreme Reality, the Root of all individual souls, knowing itself as 'I' is '*para ahantā*' - '*parāhanthā*'. *Parāśakthi*, it is usually said, is the personification of the *parāhanthā* of *Paramaśiva*, that is the *Parabrahmam*. In a passage in the *Saundaryalaharī Ambāl* is called *Paramesvarā*'s

'āhōpurushikā'. The term is commonly understood to mean boastfulness, conceit or ego-sense.

We are kinchith-*Śākthas*', that is we have very little power, so it is wrong on our part to be boastful. But is it not justified on the part of the Almighty *Paramēśvarā* to be boastful, that is for him to take pride in the 'I' that he is. Strangely enough, *Śiva*'s 'I-feeling' is on behalf of another. We saw that if *Śiva* is aware that he exists - that he knows himself as 'I' -- it is because of *Śakthi*. So if he has the 'I' feeling', if he has pride in it, it is all due to the splendour of *Śakthi*. 'I, who was by myself, had no awareness of who I was. And for such as I was, she is my almighty 'I-awareness.' The pride he takes in *Ambāl* as his 'I-awareness' is *Śiva*'s 'āhōpurushikā.' A number of commentators of the *Saundaryalaharī* have observed that *Ambāl* is the personification of the *parāhanthā* of *Śiva*, the *Parabrahmam*.

Śiva, who is pure consciousness or *jnāna*, knowing himself to be what he is (that he is pure *jnāna*) is the first pulsation of the Brahman. There is no outward movement, no action with the hands or legs. In the state of *jnāna* that is full and without any thought it is pulsation caused by the thought or feeling of 'I'.

Ambāl did not quicken *Śiva* from outside. She quickened him from within him as his 'I-feeling'.

What is called 'spandha' here means an object vibrating by itself, within itself. The *Āchāryā* uses the word very precisely. 'Spandha' is not activating something from outside. It is pulsation of an object or entity within itself and not caused by an outside agency but brought about for itself and within itself.

The root cause of creation itself is vibration. The sound of the vibration of the *Parabrahmam* became the Vēdhic manthras and from them originated all gross objects. Modern science supports such a view. If creation was caused by the explosion of a

central nucleus, it must have occurred from the pulsation within itself of the nucleus. Thus the one basic object or entity pulsating within itself is *spandhana*.

But here, with regard to a *Śāktā* hymn apparently speaking of *Śiva śakthi* in dualistic terms, can we refer to the entity in question as something that vibrates by itself? We have to say that *Ambāl* it is who makes *Śiva* pulsate. That is what the *Āchāryā* himself has said. But while doing so he has carefully chosen the word 'spandhana' (which means vibration of an entity within itself) so as to point to the non-dualism in what is seemingly a dualistic phenomenon.

Even according to the *Śāktā* system it is not possible to separate *Śakthi* from *Śiva* and make the former an outward entity. The two are like the lamp and its flame, like the flower and its fragrance, like milk and its whiteness, like honey and its sweetness, like the word and its meaning. Are not these pairs inseparably bound together? So, even if you give special 'credit' to *Śakthi* for *Śiva*'s pulsation, she cannot be separated from him. The bond uniting *Śiva* and *Śakthi* must ever remain a truth to be cherished in the innermost recesses of our hearts. [The *Mahāśwami* repeats the statement.] The mutual bond between *Śiva* and *Śakthi* must always be felt by us in the innermost recesses of our hearts.

Certain points must be borne in mind when we consider poetical works dealing with concepts centring on gods and goddesses. In such works or hymns, one deity may be depicted as being higher or lower than another and it may even be scornfully spoken of in relation to another. There is joy and aesthetic pleasure to be derived from such depictions. And the purpose of such comparisons and of extolling a particular deity as being the highest is to make a deep impression about him or her (that deity) on the minds of devotees. In this manner, even if *Ambāl* is shown

to be higher than *Śiva*, or *Śiva* is shown to be superior to *Ambāl*, the truth that they remain inseparably united must be embedded deep in our hearts. It is with this high intent that, even though in the very first stanza of the *Saundaryalaharī* the *Āchāryā* raises *Ambāl* to the highest plane and says that it is she who makes *Śiva* stir, he uses the word 'spandha' to mean such pulsation : that is he does not use terms long in common usage like 'chalana' because such words would have the implication that *Ambāl* makes *Śiva* pulsate by her remaining outside of him and separate from him. He uses the word 'spandha' to indicate, at the very beginning, that *Ambāl* exists within him.

I have referred now and then to Kashmira *Śaivism*. In it both the word 'spandha' and the concept of 'internal vibration' are important. Kashmira *Śaivism* is so called because it originated in Kashmir and spread to other parts. The exponents of the doctrine did not themselves give it that name. They called it by other names. One of these is '*Thrika-Śaivism*': it is based on the fact that it speaks of three principles, '*Paśu*', '*Pathi*' and '*Pāśa*'.

A second name is '*Pratyabhijnā-Śāsthrā*'. It is based on the concept it expounds: 'the realization that comes ultimately that *Śiva* is the form of the individual Self.' '*Pratyabhijnā*' means knowing the true nature of an object. A third name of Kashmira *Śaivism* is '*Spandha-Śāsthrā*'. The *Parabrahmam* is *Śiva* and *Śakthi* combined into one. According to *Spandha śāsthrā*, the dualistic world with its manifold objects is the '*ābhāsa*' of the *Parabrahmam*, reflection, the reflected image. We call the sun *Bhaskara*: 'bhas' means 'to shine'. If the world is the reflection of the *Parabrahmam* it would mean that the reflected light is outside of the original shining root-object. The view that the cosmos is outside of the *Brahmam* is not right. If the *Brahmam* is *Śiva* merely, it cannot be associated with the cosmos. So the cosmos may be said to be outside of the *Brahmam*. In which case *Śiva* by himself -- that is the *Brahmam* by itself -- will not produce a

reflection. According to *Kashmira Śaivism*, the Brahman is not only Śiva but Śiva and Śakti combined and it is Śakti that causes the ābhāsa.

Even so, unlike the reflection outside of the light, there is no cosmos outside of her: it is so because there cannot be anything outside of her. She is the power of everything, being in every object and also supporting it from outside and indeed grasping with her mouth [encompassing] all of them together: such is the concept of Śakti. It is within the one entity called Śiva-Śakti, in the inner pulsation in which the one becomes many that is the spandha, that all the dualistic world is contained. There is nothing that is revealed outwardly. It is like the flame of a lamp reflected in a mirror: without the mirror there can be no image. It is like this, says *Kashmira Saivism*. The word 'spandha' goes to show that not only is there no cosmos outside of the Brahman or separate from it, but also that Śakti does not create the cosmos from the Brahman by being outside of the Brahman or by being separate from it. It also shows that this Śakti is inseparably united with Śiva. 'Spandha' denotes 'self-movement': there is no movement referred to here caused by any prodding from outside.

It is this *Kashmira Saivism*, also called Spandha-Śāstrā, among the *Saiva* systems, that comes very close to our Āchārya's Adhvaita. It also comes to the conclusion of non-dualistic liberation. The Āchārya says that the world is the creation of Māyā and that it is a lie (mithya). *Kashmira Śaivism*, however, has it that the world is also real since it is the reflection of the Brahman, that is the Reality. Māyā which causes the world that we see and Īśvarā who conducts it, *Kashmira Śaivism* elaborates these two concepts of the Āchārya by adding many other aspects and it has Śiva-Śakti in the place of the Brahman. Even though it mentions Śiva first and Śakti second as it enumerates its 36 principles, it states at the same time that Śiva inheres *Chithsakthi*, -that is *jñāna*. Śiva, the Fundamental Reality (sath), always exists with *Chithsakthi* (the

power of *jnāna*) as sath-chith. But it is explained that, since the *ānandā* (bliss) in sath-chith-*ānandā* is revealed only when the cosmic drama is unfolded by *Śākthi*, we have first *Śiva* who is sath-chith and ten *Śākthi* as ananda.

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HYMN COMPOSED WITH AN OPEN MIND

Our *Āchāryā* has composed the *Saundaryalaharī* as a devotional hymn and as a *Śāktha* work for those who are not capable of following the path of *jnāna*. While doing so he speaks of the idea of spandha which is dealt with in Kashmira *Śaivism* and of concepts like '*paśu-pathi-pāśa*' found not only in that system but in other *Śaiva* disciplines also. In the penultimate stanza (99) of the hymn he says that one who is devoted to *Ambāl* will be freed from the noose of *paśu* and experience eternally the rasa of supreme bliss : '*Kshapitha paśupāśa vyathikarah*'.

What were the *Āchāryā*'s aims in composing this hymn? What benefits did he want his devotees to derive from reading it? Being a hymn to *Ambāl*, exclusive devotion must be created for her in her devotees and for this purpose she must be shown as occupying the highest plane of glory. He thought of composing a beautiful poem keeping in view the requirements of poetics. He also wanted to give in it importance to the Srividhya point of view. Even though excessive stress was not to be laid on Adhvaitha, Adhvaithic ideas were necessarily to find expression here and there in the poem, especially since they -generally conformed to the *Śrīvidhya thanthra*.

What was said about *Śiva* and *Śākthi* with respect to certain concepts and certain poetic traditions and conventions were not to create wrong impressions in the minds of people lacking in maturity, impressions that would be contrary to worldly *sthrīdharma*. The *Āchāryā* had therefore to highlight here and

there the code of conduct to be observed by our women. Instead of saying that it was according to his own resolve that he composed the *Saundaryalaharī* the proper thing for him to say would be that it was according to *Ambālī*'s resolve that he composed the hymn [fulfilling the aims mentioned above]. However, though he kept these basic aims in mind while composing the hymn, he did not take an aggressive partisan stand to propagate any particular view. He composed the work with an open mind, with a broad mind, and the poem came in a flow from him naturally, and spontaneously, without any bias. It sprang from his experience of non-dualism, from his knowledge of *Śrīvidhya thanthra* and his respect for it, and, above all, from his poetic genius. And the feelings, the *rasas*, the poetic ideas came rising in a flow in the manner it should.

'Lahari' means a flow. It cannot take an upward course. If there happen to be rocks in its way it cannot break them but it will naturally narrow itself. Similarly, though there were some restrictions, the *Āchāryā* did not lay down any rules as to how his hymn should take its course. He gave free rein to his poetic imagination, to his poetic fancy. In this flow came waves of thoughts that were to be systematized centuries later like the *Śaiva Siddhanta*, *Kashmira Śaivism*, *Viśishtādhvaitha*, *Dvaita* and so on, and he gave poetic expression to aspects of these doctrines in his hymn.

The religious doctrines that I referred to just now had not developed fully during the time of the *Āchāryā*. The chief *āchāryās* or proponents of these doctrines appeared long after him and they have made detailed references to his *Adhvaitha* while expounding their own respective systems which are different from, or even contrary to, it. However, these systems had existed in a rudimentary form before their time. *Adhvaitha* itself had existed before our *Āchāryā*, but it was he who established it as a full-fledged philosophical system.

It is in the same way that those whom we regard as the chief *āchāryās* of the other systems built their schools of thought on the basis of ideas that had been prevalent earlier. Our *Āchāryā*, being a sarvajna (omniscient), had knowledge of these systems as they existed then in their rudimentary form and it is natural that ideas drawn from them should find expression here and there in his own works.

The first stanza itself shows the heights of imagination reached by the *Āchāryā* and it is poetry that is like the current of a river in flood breaking its embankments and spilling over. So we see in it the *Āchāryā*, happy about the Brahman pulsating, celebrating the one (*Śakti*) who made it pulsate. The ultimate Truth is the state of the quiescent *Śiva*, *Śiva* who is called *Sthānu* because he is still, motionless, like a lump or log of wood. This is the state of the *Nirguṇa Brahman*, the non-dualistic state of the One Reality. *Māyā Śakti* shows it as the dualistic cosmos. The non-dualism that the *Āchāryā* teaches does not speak of *Māyā* being contained in the Brahman making it pulsate. It does not refer even to *Māyā* remaining outside of the Brahman and making it pulsate and creating the dualistic universe. The non-dualistic Brahman cannot be unstill and cannot pulsate. It is by itself. According to Adhvaitha it is on its basis or authority that *Māyā* wills and reveals the cosmos. Here *Māyā* is something reprehensible. It is because our *Ātmā* (the individual Self) is also the *Nirguṇa Brahman*. And is it not this *Māyā* that conceals it and causes us to suffer by making us believe that the body and the mind are the true 'we' (Self)? That is why all the diatribes against *Māyā*.

The *Śakti* that is condemned as *Māyā* in Adhvaitha is glorified here without the appellation of *Māyā* being given to her. If the pulsation in *Śiva* leads ultimately to the creation of the dualistic world, the power that causes it must be the *Māyā* mentioned in Adhvaitha. But the *Āchāryā* adores her in this hymn.

The *Nirguṇa Brahman* of Adhvaitha has no connection whatsoever with *Īśvarā*, the *Saguṇa Brahman* that conducts the work with the power of *Māyā*. It (the *Nirguṇa Brahman*) is by itself and not associated with anything outside of it. Somehow, and it is a wonder no one can explain, *Māyā* reveals the *Nirguṇa Brahman* as the dualistic world. In the dim light of dusk the rope appears to be a serpent. Has the rope really changed into a serpent? The serpent is an appearance—a phantom—that arises from the rope. But is there, in fact, any connection between the rope and the serpent?

But, in the *Śāktha* system dealt with by the *Āchāryā* in this hymn, *Māyā Śākthi* is not something unconnected with the Brahman. No great importance is given to *Brahma-Śākthi* in Adhvaitha. Here it is of the utmost importance: *Parāśākthi* is *Ambāl*. The function of *Māyā* is one of her aspects. At the same time, she is *Chithśākthi* that is *jñāna* and the very opposite of *Māyā*. Also she is *kriyāśākthi* and *icchāśākthi*. She is inseparably associated with *Śiva*, the *Nirguṇa Brahman*; indeed she is one with him. Here the union of *Śiva* and *Śākthi* is all-important. 'Union' means more than being together. It means oneness. Does not 'ekam' mean this? The quality of 'ekam', of being one, is 'aikyam'. In one of the concluding verses of the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*, the name 'Śiva' is followed by 'Śiva Śākthi-aikya-rūpiṇi'. The 'Śiva' in the name is more or less the *Parabrahman* according to Adhvaitha. It is by uniting with him -- the two form a 'dhampathi', a couple - and by causing pulsation in him that she creates the world and conducts it.

If there is a power, there must also be a source for it, something on which it is dependent, an 'āśraya'. If you speak of a weight of 10 kilograms, this weight or power must belong to an iron rod or something else. You cannot speak of a weight without

its *āśraya*. There is a power called fragrance. Can it exist without an *āśraya*, for instance a flower? In this way the root of all *Śakthi*, that is *Parāśakthi*, has the *āśraya* from which she cannot be dissociated, and that *āśraya* is *Śiva* or the Brahman. It is the energy of *Śiva* that is *Śakthi*. 'Separate the whiteness from the milk,' or 'Separate the sweet taste from the milk.' Are such things possible? So whatever is performed through or by *Śakthi*, *Śiva* must inevitably be a part of it. How do we add the sweetness of milk to a medical concoction? Can we do so by separating the sweetness from the milk and then adding it to the concoction? In all the doings of *Śakthi*, *Śiva* must necessarily be present.

According to *Śākhya* texts like *Śrīvidhya* the liberation obtained by the individual Self through the grace of *Ambāl* is the attainment of the tranquil Adhvaithic *Nirguṇa* state. Though such is the case with the *jīvātmā* or the individual Self, the prime Entity, according to, such texts, is associated with *Śakthi*, apart from tranquillity.

All the activity, all the whirl of the dualistic world, is for this prime Entity to find pleasure and enjoyment in witnessing the amazing 'throw' of *Śakthi*. Creation is for the prime Entity's joy in sport.

It is, however, not totally correct to say that creation is for joy, for the joy of sport. If it is said that *Ambāl* performs the function of creation for *ānandā*, it would mean that she is not in the state of *ānandā* when she does not perform a function. Can we speak of such a one as '*Sachchidānandasvarūpiṇī*'? So, instead of saying that she conducts the sport of creation for *ānandā*, we must say that she conducts the sport (or sports herself) because of her natural state of *ānandā*, bliss.

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ADHVAITHA MĀYĀ AND ŚAKTHI IN THE ŚAIVA AND ŚĀKTHA DOCTRINES

According to the *Śāktha* discipline also there is *Māyā* associated with creation. The *Śāktha* and *Śaiva* āgamas are thus broadly in agreement on the subject. However, in Adhvaitha, the Brahman is one thing and *Māyā* quite another; and the Brahman is concealed by *Māyā* and it is on its basis, on its support, that the cosmos makes its appearance. In the *Śāktha* system the matter does not end thus. Starting with *Śiva*, that is the Brahman which inheres *Śakthi*, it speaks of five 'pure thathvas' or principles and then only comes to *Māyā* which is the sixth principle. It is the same case with Kashmiri *Śaivism*. In it five 'pure principles' are mentioned first and then 31 'impure principles' starting with *Māyā*. In the *Śaiva Siddhānta* prevalent in Tamil Nadu also a total of 36 principles are mentioned but all of them are associated with *Māyā*. These 36 are divided into five 'pure *Māyā*' principles and 31 'impure *Māyā*' principles. Let us now see the *Śāktha* system in its authentic form.

In the *Śāktha* discipline, first comes the *Śiva* thathva which inheres chith that is *jnānaśakthi* and remains quiescent. Then comes the *Śakthi* thathva which is well manifested outwardly. The third is the *Sadāśivā* thathva which is associated with *icchāśakthi*. The fourth is the *Īśvara* thathva which is combined with *jnānaśakthi*. The fifth is the vidhyā thathva which is linked with *kriyāśakthi*. The sixth is the *Māyā* thathva.

I said that *Chithśakthi* remains with the first thathva of *Śiva* and that it is the same as *jnānaśakthi*. I also said that the fourth, the *Īśvarā* thathva, is combined with *jnānaśakthi*. What is mentioned as the second thathva, *Śakthi*, is indeed *Chithśakthi*. How are we to understand all this?

The first thathva is *Śiva*, the Reality, the Truth; he is the prime factor in whom *Chithśakthi* is an inner entity. The second

thathva is *Chithsakthi* as the prime factor and *Śiva*, the Reality, remaining in the background. The *jnāna* called 'chith' is not knowledge alone. It is knowledge that is imbued with life; it is consciousness. You must have heard of 'jada' and '*chēthana*', that is 'insentient' and 'sentient'. '*Chēthana*' is derived from chith. 'Jada' means 'without life, feelings, knowledge' - like stone, earth, gold, silver and so on. 'Jada' is also called '*achēthana*'. All living beings that have urges, feelings and knowledge belong to the *chētana* category. All of us belong to this class, also birds and beasts. The term 'chaitanya' (abstract noun) is derived from '*chēthana*'. *Ambālī* is called '*Chaitanya-svarūpinī*'. She is the life-giving power or energy of the Supreme Entity. It is this life-force that is knowledge or awareness, feelings and urges. '*jnāna*' is knowing what is experienced, or 'chith'. To know by reading a book that sugar is sweet is not *jnāna*. *Jnāna* here is the sweetness experienced by tasting or eating the sugar. Knowledge or knowing is possible only to the living. Chith is that with which such life-force is united. Life is the basic, fundamental, *Śakthi*. So, it follows, that *Śakthi* means *Chithsakthi*. The lifebreath of the Brahman, its self-awareness, is *Chithsakthi*.

Since *jnāna* means not only knowing but also living and consciously experiencing something, the word used for the same in English is not - 'knowledge' but the beautiful term 'consciousness'. If we are conscious of something it means that we have our own experience of it. Such experience is possible only if there is life-force in us.

Why is *Śiva* regarded as the first thathva and *Śakthi*, that is *Śiva-Śakthi*, as the second? Take the case of a 'sandow' (wrestler). We know that he possesses his strength even when he is sleeping. But it is known only when he is awake. *Śiva* thathva may be likened to the sleeping sandow, and *Śakthi* thathva to the sandow awake. The sandow who is awake feels he must show his strength :

that is the third *thathva*, *Ichhāśakthi*. The one who possesses it is *Sadāśivā*.

I said that the fourth *thathva*, *Īśvarā*, was also united with *jñānaśakthi*. This might cause confusion. After stating that the first *thathva* is associated with *chith* or *jñānaśakthi*, will it not cause confusion in the minds of people if it is said that the fourth *thathva* again is combined with *jñānaśakthi*? The *chith* first mentioned is the absolute *jñāna* of the One Prime Entity. The *jñāna* contained within awakens and becomes aware of itself in the second stage. In the third stage it wishes to manifest its force. In the fourth, it 'plans' to reveal outwardly its inwardly turned *jñāna* as the cosmos unfolding itself as many entities (plurally). If it 'planned' many worlds does it not mean that its *jñāna* is also not one within and that it is the foundation for its being revealed in many ways? What was the one *jñāna* is described as *chith* and the same as the basis for many *jñānas* in the fourth stage is described as '*jñāna*'-the two have been denoted by two different words.

What was 'planned' in the fourth stage is 'executed' in the fifth. What was 'planned' by *jñāna* is now implemented. This is what is described as the 'pure *vidhyā* *thathva*' that is combined with *kriyāśakthi*. This does not mean that the *Brahmam* has already begun to be revealed as the outward cosmos. In the fifth stage it prepares itself to do so. After waking up we try to shake off our lethargy by stretching our limbs so as to ready ourselves for the day's work. The fifth stage is similar. A 'sandow', on entering the arena, slaps his thighs and shoulders, as a warming-up exercise, before facing his rival. The fifth stage is similar. The act of creating the cosmos outside of the *Brahmam* has not yet begun. In the fifth stage it gathers all its strength, its *kriyāśakthi*, in preparation for the purpose. Without being transformed *kriyāśakthi* has gathered itself together within *Śiva-Śakthi*, that is the *Brahmam*. However, the resolve has been made to become manifest outwardly. The entity that is one, because it is going to

become dual (or plural), remains with the knowledge that it and its manifestation are equal in weight. It is this *jnāna* that is called 'pure vidhyā'.

I have mentioned three different 'powers', *ichchāsakthi*, *jnānasakthi* and *kriyāsakthi*, in that order. I shall give an example from life to show that this order is right. When a child is born it has the *ichchā* or desire to feed itself with its mother's milk. Without this desire it will not imbibe milk. It cries because of this desire. Then comes its stage of *jnāna* or knowledge that only by sucking (at its mother's breast) can it imbibe milk. Without this *jnāna* how can it imbibe milk? The *jnāna* that it must suck (its mother's breast) is proved thus. After this is the stage of *kriyā*: the child actually sucks at its mother's breast.

I told you that, unlike in Adhvaita, in the *Śāktha* system (as well as in the *Śaiva Śāsthra*) *Māyā* comes as the sixth thathva, after the fifth thathva of 'pure vidhyā' which itself is four stages after the Brahman.

The creation of the actual dualistic world is after the preparation for the outward dualistic manifestation. It is in this sixth stage that appear all creatures, individual souls. Until this stage is reached there is only the one *Śiva-Śakthi*. Can it ever be affected by *Māyā*? It is only after people (individual souls) are created from *Śakthi* as an outward manifestation of herself - to delight herself in sport, and to play hide and seek with them - that she has them bound to *Māyā*. She thus makes them oblivious of the truth that they too are the One Entity [that she herself is] and keeps them under the illusion that they are the body, the senses and the inner organs (*antah-Karāṇa*).

The wonderful force that *Śakthi* happens to be is demonstrated not only by the clouds at sunrise and sunset, by mountains like the Himalaya or the seven seas but even by the brilliance of a dew-drop on the tip of a blade of grass reflecting the

light of the sun. But all these phenomena of the vast insentient world are not sufficient for *Śiva-Śakthi* to complete the joy of the drama that is enacted as her sport. So she delights herself further by creating sentient beings, individual souls, and makes them unaware of their root (that is she makes them unaware that they too are the One Entity) by keeping them bound to *Māyā*.

‘That is all right. *Ambāl* may find delight in such sport. But does she not make our plight unbearable? What she finds delight in is an ordeal for us—is that not so? If she has four or five pure aspects above *Māyā* what do we gain by it? The fact that we are squeezed and strangled by *Māyā*, is that not like a peg in our life?’ so people may ask.

True, it is so. That is the reason why the *Āchāryā* has given importance to *Māyā* and expounded the philosophy of Adhvaitha as a way pointing to its eradication. In systems like *Śāktha*, *Māyā* comes as the sixth *thathva* but even so they do accept that it is important. Whatever the system advocated, its purpose is to show people a path to follow. So it must pay the maximum attention to the problem that seems the most important to them. Although *Ambāl* is above *Māyā* as *suddha thathvas* (pure principles) what we know about her is that, in the form of *Māyā*, she keeps us bound to *samsara* (the cycle of birth and death). That is why just as the *Parabrahmam* has the *Prāṇava*, *Śakthi* has for its *bījākshara* not only ‘*Śakthi-bījā*’ but also ‘*Māyā-bījā*’. Since any system is centred on people, *Ambāl* is often referred to as ‘*Māyā*’ and ‘*Mahāmāyā*’. Stress is laid on this fact in the *Durgā-Saptasathī*. Muthuswamy Dikshitar sang the praises of *Ambāl*, addressing her as ‘*Māyā*’.

‘All that is right. But when the *Śāktha* doctrine also agrees that, as *Māyā*, *Ambāl* has cast us into stupor and kept us bound, how is it right to extol and worship her, that is *Śakthi*? This power keeps us hidden from our true identity and drags us down by giving

us the mind, the senses, the world and worldly goods and also loves and hates. Is not the right thing then to do what the *Āchāryā* does in his Adhvaitha philosophy of excoriating her, that is *Māyā*? Why then should there be *pūjā* to her and a hymn to celebrate her? Why has the *Āchāryā* who attacks *Māyā* composed a hymn like this?’

Such a question would be justified if the *Mahā-Śakthi* were no more than the *Māyā-Śakthi*. The point to note is that she, the *Māyā-Śakthi*, is also the *jnānaśakthi*. Is she not also the *anugraha-Śakthi* (the power that grants us grace), the *anugraha-Śakthi* that bestows *jnāna* on us and frees us from *Māyā*? As I said earlier, she keeps the individual Self bound to *Māyā*: the purpose of the same is for her to have the ‘extra’ joy derived from the sport of separating us from the One Entity and uniting us again with It. In sum, she protects us remaining herself not only as *Māyā-Śakthi* but as *jnānaśakthi*, *anugraha-Śakthi*, *Prēma-Śakthi* and *saundarya-Śakthi*.

What are these new *Śakthis* like *Prēma-Śakthi*, *anugraha-Śakthi*, *saundarya-Śakthi* and so on, not included among those mentioned before, the ones starting from *chith*? The answer to such a question is that all these new *Śakthis* are contained in *icchāśakthi* about which I have already spoken. ‘*Ichchā*’ means ‘desire’. What does it mean to be loving or affectionate? Does it not denote desire? The primordial *icchā* of *Ambāl* did not stop with the desire of dividing herself into many separate *jīvātmās* [people, individual souls]. *Ambāl* has *Ichchā* for them, that is she has great love for them, that is the love of a mother for her children. How can *Ambāl* not have affection for those born of herself? Mother, children, filial affection, all these came later, and affection in this world is but a reflection of her original motherly affection. It is because of her *Ichchā* or desire for the *jīvātmās* that she apparently pushes them into *Māyā* so as to derive the extra joy to be had from uniting them with her after their being separated from her. Thus

bringing people under the spell of *Māyā* is her *Ichhā* and freeing them from it is her *anugraha-icchā* [the desire to grant them her grace]. This is a process, a manifestation of her *icchā* of freeing them little by little from *Māyā* and drawing them back to herself. It is to attract the world of humans that she sports as the personification of beauty, as one possessing beauty of form as well as the beauty constituted by her qualities. At first is the desire to become this, to act in this manner, and only then comes the stage of translating the desire into action. It is because of her *icchā* that she actually attracts people with her beauty. *Ichhā* is the seed of all action. We mortals may act without our volition or *Ichhā*, out of some necessity or propelled by some natural force beyond us. But she, the *Parabrahma-Śakthi*, does things only after she desires to do them, that is on her volition or *icchā*. *Prēma-Śakthi*, *anugraha-Śakthi* and *saundarya-Śakthi* are among the many forms of *Ichhāśakthi*. What is generally known as love is *prēma*; freeing a person, the individual Self, from *Māyā* and granting him release or showing him the path to reach that goal is the highest point of love, that is *anugraha*. Though *Ambāl* grants us her *anugraha* even to pass an examination, the term *anugraha* really means our passing the ordeal of fire conducted by *Māyā* and graduating to *jnāna*. All this is *Ambāl*'s work. It is that which grants us unalloyed and eternal beatitude. *Anugraha* means making us the Brahman.

However, the *Śākthi* and *Śaiva Śāstrās* have it that concealing the reality of our being the Brahman and our being forgetful of the same, our being in possession of a body as a *jīvātmā* and *antah-Karāṇa* (let us take it to mean the mind) that involves the body in action, the world in which we are engaged in work or activity, the enjoyment we derive in worldly actions -all these are part of *anugraha*. This *anugraha* includes 'thanu', 'Karāṇa', 'bhuvana' and 'bhōga'. 'Thanu' means the body, 'Karāṇa', the 'antah Karāṇa' or the mind, 'bhuvana' the world, 'bhōga' what is

experienced by the individual Self. 'What injustice is this? Giving us the four, *thanu*, *Karaṇa*, *bhuvana* and *bhōga*, that are responsible for our being forgetful of our true Self as the Brahman, and undergoing suffering as *jīvātmas* : is this called *anugraha*? Does not liberation mean being freed from all the four, *thanu*, *Karaṇa*, *bhuvana* and *bhōga*?' The *Śāsthṛās* (*Śāktha* and *Śaiva*) say in reply: 'After somehow becoming a *jīvātmā*, you have been trapped in *karmā*. There is no liberation for you until you exhaust your *karmā*. Is it not so? How will karma be exhausted? Is it not to be worked out by experiencing it, its consequences? How are the fruits of past karma to be experienced? By being born again, by thinking good (with the mind) and doing good (with the body). To do so you need the world (*bhuvana*). It is only by working in the world (*bhuvana*), employing your body and mind (*thanu* and *Karaṇa*) and having varied experience (*anubhōga*) that you can work out your karma. That is why being endowed with the body, mind and so on is called an *anugraha*. The four (*thanu*, *Karaṇa*, *bhuvana* and *bhōga*) which are responsible for our being ensnared in karma are the very means of our being liberated from it. That is why the four are described as an *anugraha* bestowed on us. But how difficult it is to make good use of these means. So *anugraha* in the true sense is *Ambāl*'s grace in granting us good sense and discrimination to work out our karma and being vouchsafed the bliss of final release.

Mokshānanda, the beatitude of liberation. After its karma has been worked out entirely, the *jīvātmā*, the individual Self, is not inert but in a state of bliss in which it knows itself to be an entity that is full by itself. Vouchsafing us such a state is *Ambāl*'s *anugraha*, her grace.

Now, after bringing together all the *Śākthis* I have so far mentioned, I am going to speak about another *Śākthi*. That is *Ānanda-Śākthi*, the power of bliss. There is nothing higher than

the bliss of the *Ātmā*, the bliss of realising the Self. It is this bliss that *Ambāl* grants us in the form of liberation. But in *Ātmānandā* there is *Śiva* but no *Ambāl*. Without stopping after the state of fullness she unfolds her power and sports herself. The one who is ananda herself sports joyfully outwardly also. Experiencing the bliss of the Self, she makes herself playfully into two (or dual) and as a separate entity, or seemingly as a separate entity, to manifest herself as the dualistic cosmos. When we, in an ecstasy of delight, play with whatever comes to hand, we throw it up and catch it with our hands when it comes down. Any object will do, any plank or board, for us to beat like playing the mrudangam. Such behaviour is seen more pronouncedly in children. See how a child jumps about, how playful it is, when it is overcome by joy. The *Mahāśakthi* of the Brahman becomes playful when its joy waxes.

Why is such joy called sport, play? How else can you describe something done for no particular reason, for no purpose, and merely out of overflowing joy? Since *Śakthi* is the embodiment of ananda to start with, it would be wrong to state that her joy is revealed outwardly in dualistic creation. It would be wrong again to say that she performs the function of creation to derive joy from it. There is nothing she has to obtain, nothing she has to attain. She is fullness, not wanting for anything. If such a one performs the act of creation it means that she does so in the same way as we play about for no reason in the ecstasy of our happiness. We obtain joy in such playfulness. So we continue to keep sporting. It is in the same way that *Ambāl* acts. If we say that she acts in the same way as we act it would mean that the image (the reflection or *pratibimba*) acts like the subject (the *bimba*): it would be a topsyturvy statement. It is only from her sport of creation that we ourselves derive the joy of sporting.

There is no reason behind it, nor is the sport conducted with the expectation of any fruit or reward. Sometimes we make a

remark or statement without any particular reason and then we say, 'I said so for the fun of it.' Though the work of creation is done for no reason and for no reward, because of the joy it gave her in the beginning, *Ambāl* continues to conduct the sport of creation. On the whole sport is a matter of joy, of *ānandā*. That is why *ānandā* is regarded as a full-fledged entity and the work of creation, carried out without any reason for it, is called '*līlā*' - play, sport.

This prodigious cosmic sport has been going on for crores of kalpas, for aeons and will go on for crores of kalpas. What an immense power of joy she must be who is its source, its spring. It is sport of immeasurable dimensions. So it follows that the one who sports must be immeasurable joy personified. Although sorrow, fear and cruelty are the opposite of joy, they too are immeasurable in our life in this world. Yet *Ambāl* goes sporting in the same manner. Considering this -- though she has many kinds of *Śakthi* -- her *ānanda-Śakthi* transcends all her other powers. Her very great joy rises bubbling up, showing that she is such an *ānanda-Śakthi* as to contain all *Śakthis* -- and in this joy all the cruelty, sorrow and fear that we experience in the world are like a dash of pickle added to a sweet and changing its taste. From trifling types of joy -- that of eating ice-cream is one such -- to the absolute bliss of realising the Self, she stands for all kinds of joy: from the paltry, trifling, to the great ineffable beatitude of liberation.

Those who regard the *Parabrahmam* as the Radha-Krishṇa couple speak of Radha as *Krishṇa's 'hlādhini-Śakthi'* [the power that gladdens *Krishṇa*]. '*Hlāda*' means joy. How is joy outwardly manifested? By laughter. The word 'laugh' is to be traced to the German and to its Sanskrit root, '*hlād*'.

Joy is the nature of life itself. Love and beauty are for joy, a means to obtain it. Did we not speak of chith as being imbued with life, feeling and *jñāna*. 'Chithkala' is one of the names of *Ambāl* or

Śakthi occurring in 'The One Thousand Names of Lalitha'. The names appearing next are '*Ānandakalikā*' and '*Prēmarūpā*'. All these names are interlinked.

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JNĀNIA THROUGH MĀYĀ

One who is all this [*Ambāl*] as described above] -- is it right to attack her regarding her as *Māyā-Śakthi* alone and wonder why we should perform *pūjā* to her? If you ask, 'Has she not got us bound to *Māyā*?' there is an answer to it. The *Śāktha* discipline and other systems belonging to the path of devotion have it that all those things that keep us bound to *Māyā* are divinely connected. Although *Māyā* and *jnāna* are opposed to each other, it is as a means to take the path of *jnāna* that the world of *Māyā*, the senses and the mind are to be involved in love and in beauty that are unsullied; and puja, hymns and so on are prescribed so that we will be blissfully immersed in *Ambāl*'s remembrances. If our mind became one-pointed in this manner it would be easy to engage ourselves in reflections that are a necessary part of *jnāna*. If we adhere to the path of devotion as shown by the *Āchāryā* we will be able to follow the path of *jnāna* easily, making use of the very instruments of the world of *Māyā*.

Those who are, to start with itself, capable of keeping their minds and senses under control and who are passionless and detached do not have to employ them (their minds and senses) in the performance of *pūjā* and other rites connected with devotion. They can realise the Brahman using the 'short-cut' of shaking off *Māyā* through spiritual practice. In his teaching imparted to them the *Āchāryā* lays stress on *Māyā* that is to be discarded as worthless and on the goal of the *Ātmā* to be achieved, prescribing for the same *jnāna*, self-inquiry and practice aimed at attaining the ideal of Adhvaitha. He exhorts the rest to involve their minds -

which otherwise are caught in the noose of *Māyā* by being addicted to petty pleasures – in matters that give joy that is pure and belonging to a higher plane like remembrance of the Lord, puja, listening to stories of the divine, and worship at temples. In this way he shows them the path of devotion by following which they will eventually become mature and qualify for the way of *jnāni*. Thus it is that the *Āchāryā* who excoriates *Māyā* extols her at the same time as '*Mahāmāyā*'.

Pūjā, the singing of hymns and so on, that form part of the way of devotion, are meant for those who cannot yet cast off *Māyā* as taught by Adhvaitha. Such people must regard *Māyā* as the sport of God, of *Parāśakthi*, and as associated with the divine. All the objects of the world of *Māyā*, the senses and the mind that have them under their sway and all those things that we enjoy and thereby become spoilt, must be involved in the worship of *Mahāśakthi*, who rules over *Māyā*, through *pūjā*, recitation of hymns, listening to the *Purāṇās*, worship at temples, japa and meditation. In this way these very objects must be rendered pure. While we do *pūjā* to *Ambāl* we make a variety of offerings to her, adorn her in several ways present before her sweet and savoury items that are made her *prasāda*. And dance and music are not merely for our entertainment; we offer them to her with a heart that melts in devotion for her. We must associate paintings and sculptures with the divine instead of allowing them to create improper urges in us.

There is then the fivefold worship of her, what is called '*pañchōpachāra*': the offering of perfumes (sandal-paste), flowers, incense, lights and naivedya. The purpose of this is to associate the five elements and the five senses with the divine. The faculty of speech we employ to sing *Ambāl*'s praises; our ears we use to listen to stories of the divine and our eyes for the *dharsan*. We throw ourselves down, prostrate ourselves before *Ambāl*: perform '*anga-*

pradakshiṇā ' and engage the mind in japa and meditation. All these acts belong to the path of devotion. When we are caught in *Māyā* it is a means of creating attachment to *Mahāśakthi*, who is the cause of *Māyā*, through the very objects of *Māyā*.

Things connected with *Māyā* cannot easily be done away with. Except those who are mature, detached and possess discrimination, all the rest are constantly lured by the world, by the senses and the attachments caused by the same. Those who want to sever such ties, but are yet immature, will not succeed in their endeavour to do so. We feel angry with ourselves when we find that we cannot be freed from such ties and find ourselves without hope and feel 'we can never have release' . That is why, instead of discarding the objects of *Māyā*, they are given a divine connection. We are taught to be devoted to that Object which is the cause not only of *Māyā* but all else. We must love that Object and through *pūjā*, singing, meditation and so on worship it by means of the very instruments of *Māyā*. Thus if the objects created by *Māyā* are given a divine connection they will in due course cease to affect us, ensnare us. If you touch a live electric wire with your bare hand you will get a shock, but if you touch the same wearing gloves nothing will happen to you. Similar is the case with *Māyā* and the objects of *Māyā*. If you handle them wearing the gloves of devotion they will not affect you.

What I have in mind -- what I am going to tell you -- may seem strange. But the idea occurred to me and I feel I must express it. I was dealing with *Māyā*. There is everything in it except the highest stage of the realisation of the truth of the *Athmā*: there is in it even the means of seeking *jñāna*, that is *sādhana*. The object of *sādhana*, the one who is engaged in *sādhana*, the act of *sādhana* - these are separate and therefore dualistic in nature. That means it is all *Māyā*. The effort to do away with *Māyā* through the instruments of *Māyā* is part of the *sādhana* for Adhvaitic

realisation. I am not telling you something new. It has been told before. Even the act of the guru teaching his disciple, imparting him *upadēsa* is dualistic in a sense; but it is at the same time a means of obtaining non-dualistic realisation. Let me illustrate the idea. Suppose a man is dreaming and hears a lion roaring. He gets up in fright, even though it was all a dream and comes to the waking state. Even the lion of the dream is able to bring him to wakefulness. So the guru, who teaches his disciple in his dualistic life, takes him to the wakefulness of *jnāna*. 'Since *sāadhanā* itself is dualistic, why not speak of such types of *sāadhanā* as have goals other than Adhvaitha? When any dualistic subject used for divine purposes qualifies one to take the path of *jnāna*, would not the practices pertaining to other systems, their rites, their *Śāsthras* do the same (qualify one to seek *jnāna*)? So let me, without any reservation, compose the hymn naturally, whatever the system my thought process takes me as the stanzas take shape.' We may take it that the *Āchāryā* must have thought to himself thus and blessed us with his *Saundaryalaharī* reflecting such a view. That is why in this hymn he gives voice here and there to thanthra, dualism, qualified non-dualism, and *Śaiva* and *Śāktha* concepts.

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ŚAKTHI AND LĪLĀ IN ADHVAITHA

An important point cannot but be mentioned here. One must not think that Adhvaitha makes no mention of *Śākthi* at all since it associates creation with *Māyā*. Is there any need for a man following the path of *jnāna* to turn to *Śākthi*? That is why no special importance is given to it in Adhvaitha. Otherwise, it is not true that no mention is made in it at all of anything called *Śākthi*. When it speaks of the *Paramātmā*, the *Chāndōgya Upanishad* says that it possesses all karma, all desire (*kāma*), all scents, all essences (*rasas*). The *Thaithirīya Upanishad* has it that because of the desire

of the *Paramātmā* the one Entity became multifarious - 'akāmayata' is the word used here. I told you about this earlier. 'The *Paramātmā* was not happy being alone by itself. So It desired a companion and itself became two as husband and wife.' A view expressed in the *Bṛuhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* comes close to the *Kāmēśvara-Kāmēśvari* concept. Besides, this Upanishad says that all orders of life originated from the two, the primordial Mother and Father.

What the Upanishads speak of the *Paramātmā* as being Almighty, the *Brahmasūthra* underlines when it says '*Sarvopetha cha thadh-darśanāth*'.

In his commentaries on the Upanishads our *Āchāryā* does not slur over questions raised by such references. Since he speaks about the concept of *Māyā*, he does not gloss over matters relating to *Śakthi*. In his commentary on the *Brahmasūthra* he says clearly: '*Sarva-Śakthi-yukta paradēvatā*'. Since he himself regards *Māyā* as '*anirvachanīya*' ('indefinable' or 'indescribable') he has no reason to be afraid of asking questions about the origins of *Śakthi*. We cannot compare the Brahman to other objects in the world and ask questions like, 'How can that be?' We can gauge the profound depths of the Brahman only by what the *Vēdhas* say about them, not by arguments, so observes the *Āchāryā* with an air of finality.

The question of creation arises only when the Brahman is not by itself, when it is not absorbed in itself, in the state of samādhi. According to the *Āchāryā*, when the *Nirguṇa* Brahman; in the state of pure *jñāna*, is associated with the creation posited by avidhya or *Māyā* it acquires an accession of universal power (*sarva-Śakthiyōga*).

'The Brahman becomes united with universal power (*sarvaśakthi*): this means the same as '*Śivah Śakthiyā yukthah*'.

The concept of creation as the *līlā* or sport (of the divinity) is also mentioned in the *Brahmasūthra*, '*Lokavath thu līlā*

kaivalyam.' In concluding his commentary on this passage the *Āchāryā* observes: 'According to the *Vedhas* creation does not have to do with the Supreme Truth, the *Nirguṇa Brahman*. It is the dualistic view, worldly truth ('*vyavahāra sathyam*') born of avidhya (nescience).' Though the *Āchāryā* speaks thus from the standpoint of Adhvaitha, he accepts the fact of creation as the sport of *Īśvarā* in the *vyavahāra* or empirical stage and speaks in praise of it taking delight in it. He says: 'The creation of the cosmos may seem to us to be a very great feat but is just play for *Īśvarā* since he has unbounded *Śakti*.'

There is the authority of the Upanishads to show that the dualistic cosmos is caused by the inner vibration ('*spandha*') of the non-dualistic Brahman. The *Katōpanishad* says: 'All this universe is caused from the life-force called *prāṇa* and vibrates.' For 'vibrates' the word used is '*ejati*'. '*Ējanam*' means 'kampana,' that is 'vibration'. The meaning here may approximately be taken to be that something that vibrates inwardly by itself and not vibrating because of any force outside of it. The word used in this context in the *Brahmaṣūtra* is '*kampanāth*'. Commenting on this the *Āchāryā* observes: 'The *prāṇa* that causes vibration is not mere breath but the Brahman itself.'

If we go through the relevant texts we will come across more such statements to show that Adhvaitha accepts the view of creation by *Māyā* as a worldly truth at a particular stage, thus favouring the *Śāktha* standpoint.

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HOW WE MUST APPROACH THE HYMN

It is with an open mind that the *Āchāryā* has poured out his ideas about various religious systems as they come up in the course of composing his hymn. For that reason we must not make the mistake of thinking that his work contains a mix-up of various

concepts. Like him we too must have an open mind. Indeed our mind must be rapt in the hymn as we read it and we must let the 'lahari' take its course. We must also, in all humility, pray to the *Āchāryā* and to *Ambāl* thus: 'May we be rewarded with good by reading the hymn.' If we do so we will become absorbed in the same feelings and emotions as those of the *Āchāryā*; we will in fact be, bathed in them and rewarded with happiness that is divine.

Doctrines that may seem strange to you are dealt with here but that should not influence your own attitude to the hymn and you must try to derive the full benefit from it. When certain concepts are expalined -- and in the course of certain descriptions -- allegories arise and these should not be understood in an improper manner. Perhaps 'allegory' is not the right word. Transforming concepts deliberately into characters of a story [symbolic representation of truths] using our imagination is 'allegory'. The *Śāsthrās* and *Purāṇas* are not created out of the imagination of their authors. It is *Parāśakthi* herself who has revealed the concepts and truths contained in them to the great men, the seers, who composed them. If this world is real, so are the concepts and stories told in these *Śāsthrās* and *Purāṇas*, concepts and stories that help us to be liberated from this world and dissolve in our true form [that is the Ultimate]. Even today if we practise japa and meditation in the proper manner, if our hearts melt in devotion, we will be able to see forms revealed by *Parāśakthi* to great men [as mentioned before]. We will be able to see them face to face. When we have *dharṣan* of these divine forms, love and joy will overflow from our hearts and we will be taken to the state of experiencing our real form, the form or entity that is the source or basis of the fullness of joy. So 'allegory' is not the right word in this context.

What I wish to say is this. Matters relating to the divine personification of certain concepts may give the impression of

their being different from what is laid down as right and proper for us mortals as what is good and morally correct for us. We must not think that they are wrong and not in keeping with the norms of morality. In the light in which the concepts in question are to be understood they will be regarded as right and proper.

In the same way, it is not correct to use the yardstick of our mundane life in assessing what is said according to poetic traditions, as part of poetic imagery, or according to conventions, nor should the same be rejected as opposed to norms of good conduct. To represent reality as reality is to make a carbon copy of it: it is '*lōkadharmī*' and lacking in aesthetic value. When the same is represented in drama, some of its aspects may be underplayed and some others heightened: this is '*nātyadharmī*'. In the tradition of *nātyadharmī*, the dramatists write their plays according to their poetic fancy and imagination. What applies to drama also applies to sculpture, painting and other arts. Instead of imitating Nature or worldly life in all detail an artist must use his creativity, to transform (or transmute) it according to the rules of art so as to provide enhanced aesthetic satisfaction. When there is a great poetic or sculptural tradition, and works are created in that tradition, we must accept the fact that such a tradition is preserved only by the new poets and artists, following in the footsteps of their predecessors.

This is the second point to be borne in mind for a proper appreciation of the *Saundaryalaharī*. The first point is to accept the various concepts or doctrines that crop up in the course of the hymn and their appropriateness in the contexts in which they are dealt with. It is not necessary to worry about whether a doctrine appearing in a particular passage has been dealt with before or will be discussed later. The second point [to repeat] is this: Certain ideas are dealt with in the form of metaphors - or as symbolic stories - and there may be others that are explained according to

the aesthetics of poetry. It would be wrong to judge them by mundane standards of good conduct. It would also be equally wrong to reject them as being in bad taste.

Only by adopting such an approach would we derive the full benefit from works like the *Saundaryalaharī* that combine poetry with *Śāsthrās*.

Why I say this is because such matters (as mentioned above) are dealt with, though only briefly, in the *Saundaryalaharī* and we must approach them with a pure heart, a pure mind and with humility. *Śāsthrās* like *Śrīvidhya* say that creation was accomplished by *Śivam*, that is in place of the Brahman, and by *Kāmēsvari* who is the embodiment of its *Ichhā* or desire. Here the *Srungāra* or erotic sentiment is expressed in the form of a concept. Ideas like this are seen with in this work. For centuries people have read the hymn with a pure heart. They were concerned only with the meaning of the concepts dealt with in the work and, banishing evils like *kāma* or desire from their hearts, they have had experience of an elevated nature. *Mūka* (in his *Panchasathī*) frequently breaks out thus: 'O Mother, you have inspired *kāma* (desire) in *Śiva* himself, *Śiva* who is the destroyer of *Kāma*. You, who have been so, will banish evils like *kāma* from people and bless them with *jnāna*.'

People in our country had, by and large, the right approach to the hymn. Even so the severe *sāadhanā* based on the concepts dealt with in it required learning the hymn at the feet of a guru. In such cases only the mature and the deserving received instruction from the guru. It also meant that only those who could grasp the meaning of the passages in the right spirit, passages that are otherwise likely to be improperly interpreted, were taught. In the guru-sishya tradition what has to be treated as a mystery, as a secret, remained well protected [from the undeserving and the immature]. Stanzas dealing with elements of *Śāsthrās* or

containing certain poetic imagery or descriptions were not elaborated upon when it came to explaining the hymn to people in general. They were briefly touched upon or glossed over.

What is to be underlined here is this: the basic approach of our people to the hymn has been right and proper all these centuries. 'Why do we read devotional poems or listen to stories told from the *Purānās*? Or why do we go to worship in temples? To purify ourselves; to wash away the evils in us like desire; to nurture our spirit of devotion and become worthy of the grace of *Īśvarā*.' Such was the attitude of our people and they adhered to it with determination. So in that state of mind of theirs they did not pay much attention to things that seemed to go against the goals they had in mind, things like certain descriptions in a hymn, certain stories in a *Purānā* or certain sculptures in a temple. They thought to themselves, 'Great men have somehow permitted these things and we must not allow ourselves to be distracted by them. Our aim is to render ourselves pure, be engaged in our devotions and become worthy of divine grace.' Thus they remained fixed to whatever helped them in achieving their goal and all else they either took lightly or dismissed altogether as unwanted, focusing their attention on such matters as fostered their inner life, their *Āthmā*.

In approaching questions of religion there must be a certain humility on our part. Our people in the past were humble enough not to question everything, nor were they inclined to inquire into every subject like research scholars. They had a disciplined approach to their religion based on a recognition of their own level of understanding. Thus they did not dismiss a concept as wrong only because certain descriptions relating to it appeared not proper to them and at the same time they did not go deeply into what did not seem wrong to them. They too read such [erotic] descriptions; they too saw such [erotic] sculptures, but they did so in passing, because their real interest was in things that helped to

make them pure inwardly. If the gods seemed to be swayed by sensual passions and anger, they knew that they (the gods) existed on a plane different from that of ordinary mortals. So they did not take the trouble of finding out the real meaning of their moods and actions in a conceptual sense, nor did they, in the manner of research scholars, worry about their poetic 'value'.

All through these millennia our people have followed the tradition of listening to the narration of *Purāṇās*, of singing devotional hymns, of reciting the *Thēvāram* and the *Divya-prabandham*, of worshipping in temples, but all this has not in the least caused improper thoughts, feelings or urges in their minds. There are devotees and connoisseurs of poetry and of the arts who make a deep study of literary passages (as mentioned above) and artistic creations like sculptures to discover their inner meaning and the symbols contained in them, but ordinary people in the past did not go deep into things like them and they took them 'lightly' since they were concerned mainly with their goal of achieving inner purity.

Take the case of a doctor. In examining a patient thoroughly he has to see all parts of the body. His only concern then is with the patient's health: thus he has a high purpose in examining his patient. He examines even his stools in the laboratory. Wearing spotlessly white dress and observing strict rules of hygiene, he tests 'all sorts of things' of even a cholera patient. He asks us not to go close to a patient suffering from an infectious or contagious disease but he himself examines under the microscope the bacteria or viruses, as the case may be, that have caused the disease. Can we do all the things that he does? Or can we say that the things he does are improper and that he must not do them? Or that the science of medicine must not deal with such things? The same good sense prevailed among our people in dealing with religious themes. Things went on smoothly then. Since our country was like a plot of

land properly divided with ridges, it flourished and won fame that was unparalleled in the world.

Now things have unfortunately changed with the establishment of printing presses. Anyone can write books on any subject and any number of copies can be printed of the same. *Śāsthrās* that have to be preserved as a secret, as a mystery (that is not to be revealed to the undeserving), are now available in print and are distributed among people, with no thought as to their degree of maturity. The practice of interpreting such *Śāsthrās* wrongly, in any manner as one fancies, has become widespread. People in general have lost their sense of discipline and humility; they feel that, as free citizens, they can hold any view they like about these texts. With the result that each man interprets them according to his whims. This has led to 'artha' becoming 'anartha'.

Those who write or publish books on our religious texts have no first-hand experience of the truths contained in them, nor do they practise the way of life prescribed in them. Writing books or publishing them is just their occupation, their trade. The majority of those who buy such books do not read them with any intention of following the teachings contained in them. Or it is just out of curiosity that they buy the books--or it may be their purpose is to find material for a thesis they wish to write or to write a book themselves. People who write on the *Śāsthrās* and teach them--and people who read what they write and learn --neither have the required maturity nor the right attitude towards traditional religious texts. How can there be, then, any inner benefit flowing from such an exercise? First there are mistakes in what is written on the *Śāsthrās* and in how they are learned: the teaching imparted and the teaching received are both faulty since, in a majority of cases, the rules pertaining to them are not observed.

There are two major unfortunate developments today. On the one hand, people who have, from generation to generation,

been upāsakās in a particular system and are entitled to be so have abandoned their upāsanā and have taken to a purely worldly life; and, on the other, some have become upāsakās without being qualified to be so and without observing the required rules. Anybody today can be engaged in any type of religious service, which means he who ought to do upāsanā does not do it and he who ought not to do it does it. Of the two which trend is the more undesirable?

Today people not only write books and 'research articles' but also give lectures to present a wrong view of the concepts and symbols dealt with in our religious literature. In fact, they write or speak whatever comes to their mind. What is the impact of their ideas? Among those who believe that they have faith in our religion and who take pride in it, there are many who want our religion to be purged of certain elements in order to make it 'pure'. What are these according to them? These are not only *Kāpālikam* and decadent left-hand thanthra (*vāmāchāra*) but also certain aspects of worship adopted even by the virtuous. Their view seems to be preferable to what another set of people think of our religion. They do not try to frighten us by pointing to any 'revolting', 'obscene' or 'cruel' elements in our religion. They believe that there is much in our *Śāsthrās* to support the view that our religion is based on Nature. So, according to them, we may in our pursuit of realism write any kind of story or article, or shoot any kind of film. There is a third school which has no respect for religion. It ignores the mountains and mountains of good things in our *Śāsthrās* and Purānās, seeks out certain elements which seem undesirable to it, magnifies them under its microscope and proclaims that religion itself is 'rubbish' and propagates atheism.

All these unfortunate developments are the consequence of the present trend of 'democratising' everything without any sense of discrimination. How can it be set right? Will it be set right if I speak about it? It is doubtful if such an exercise on my part will be

fruitful. I would be merely giving room to the accusation that the 'Sāṅkarāchāri' is raising a cry because he has a vested interest to protect. However, after having started to speak about the *Saundaryalaharī*, I thought I would be guilty of a lapse if I did not mention the precautions to be taken in popularising a hymn like it which contains things that should be kept as a secret, as a mystery.

It is not that only those who are initiated into *Śrīvidhya thanthra* who can read hymns like the *Saundaryalaharī* which contains ideas that are to be guarded as a secret. There is nothing wrong in everyone reading the hymn as a devotional work with the resolve, 'Through this hymn may we be enabled to fix our minds on *Ambāl* for a few moments at least.' It is with the common people in mind that a *Śāsthrā* has been given the form of a hymn. Through such hymns, which are pregnant with concepts and truths contained in the *Śāsthrās*, the common people will at least come to know of the existence of certain religious systems, and this is one of their purposes. It would be sufficient for them to know that there exist such religious disciplines and that it is not necessary for them to go deep into them. Nor do they need to try to understand the esoteric doctrines they contain. Even if you do not understand the meaning of such hymns, they will do good to you, to all mankind, by the mantrik potency of the sounds of the stanzas constituting them. Generally speaking, any hymn will do us good if it is recited in a spirit of devotion.

A *sthothra*, or a hymn, is not merely sound and words. Its author must have composed it with the high purpose that everybody must benefit by reciting it; so it is imbued with the spirit of his very life. The hymn, which is a living entity, will definitely do good to its readers. And it goes without saying that the deity that is hymned will also reward them with his/her grace. Indeed it is the deity that ultimately brings rewards to those who read the hymn. The life-force of the author of the hymn will speak to the deity on our behalf to grant us the fruits of our devotion. In due

course, the devotee, as he keeps reading the hymn, will receive the blessings of the deity and will eventually be encouraged to study the *Śāsthṛā* dealt with in the hymn after receiving proper initiation from a guru. It is then, and only then, can he, through his guru, grasp the hidden meaning of the stanzas, the secret embedded in them. During a public discourse it is not proper to explain passages with hidden meanings.

What is called a rahasya, a secret or a mystery, applies not *only to a metaphor or a symbol standing for a concept*. I have omitted to speak to you about an important subject. I have been referring only to conceptual metaphors or symbols as rahasyas. There is another--and it pertains to manthra *Śāsthṛā*. Since conceptual metaphors will be given an impure meaning by the immature they must not be revealed to all. There is another matter which will not be regarded as unclean but which is full of potency. So it too must be kept as a secret from the immature and imparted only to the deserving. Everybody cannot keep a revolver. There is a law that one must have a licence to possess the weapon. Manthras, the letters or syllables constituting them, must be protected as a mystery. Concepts that are likely to be misinterpreted as impure are very few in the *Saundaryalaharī* but it abounds in subjects relating to manthra and thanthra. I am happy I am reminded of it at least now.

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KUNDALINI YÔGA GREAT CAUTION NEEDED

There is another subject which too must be kept as a mystery without being revealed to all and sundry. Even to mention its name would be as good as revealing it. So I had all this while refrained from speaking about it but I shall now touch upon the subject briefly. Yes, I am touching upon the subject to warn you that none of you must touch it! Even if I don't wish to speak about it, it is very much in the air--everybody is talking about it. The names of

the chakras (wheels, centres, lotuses) connected with it are now well known. They crop up in the *Saundaryalaharī*. When you read the hymn you will come across the names of the chakras. So even if I don't deal with them you will try to find out about them from books. So I thought I would speak about the subject myself, speak to you about why I am not going to speak about it.

Just as every tiny atom is packed with immense power, so every individual contains in himself the *Parabrahma-Śakti* in the form of the *Kundalini-sakti*. In people like us it lies in a dormant state. If we practice *yōga*-note the words '*if we practice yōga*' - it will awake little by little and, rising through certain chakras, become fully awake in the end as *Parāśakti*. Then *Parāśakti* will unite with *Paraśiva*, that is the individual Self will become united with the Brahman. This, in essence, is the subject of *Kundalini yōga*. It is enough if you know this--if you know so much. Being born in this land, should we not know at least the A B C of our *Śāstrās*, of our sciences, the ways of worship prevalent in it?

But not even one in a million among us, will be able to do the *sādhana* in the proper manner of *Kundalini yōga*. Even among such people there may be only one or two rare individuals who will achieve success in the *yōga*. It is as the Lord says in the *Gītā*, '*Yathathāmapī ... kaschin*' (VII-3). That is why I laid stress on the words, '*if we practice*'; but practice seems impossible. To mingle this little power that is the individual Self with the great power that is the *Paramātmā*, of the individual Self blossoming into the great power, is not something that happens easily.

Parāśakti has made it more difficult for the individual Self to dissolve in *Śakti* than for it to dissolve in serenity to become the *Parabrahman*.

There are people who follow the path of devotion and there are those who follow the path of *jnāna*. *Ambāl* has both by her side and she makes them witness her dance of power. Not only that, she

imparts them a little bit of that power and makes them instrumental in conferring her grace on the world. However, neither devotees nor *jñānis* desire power on their own. The devotee longs for love, the bliss of love, while the *jñāna* longs for tranquility that is boundless. *Ambāl* shows them her power, as if telling them, 'See the splendour of my power.' She grants them this power in small measure with a view to creating the well-being of the world. But the *yōgi* is different. He practices *Kundalini yōga* with the deliberate intent of obtaining power. But *Ambāl* does not respond to his efforts easily. She seems to haggle over the price the *yōgi* has to pay for it. And when she relents, she reveals only a wee bit of her power and that too through some nook or cranny.

Today many people give initiation into *Kundalini yōga*, and many receive it. And many also claim that the dormant Kundalini has awakened in them. But what they claim is nothing but the power of *Ambāl* revealed through some nook or cranny. It is not *Śakthi* revealed in all her glory, like the radiance of the rising sun. If, generally, the life-force in all of us is asleep more than three quarters, in those who practice this *yōga*, the Kundalini may be awake a little more than in us. Even practitioners whose Kundalini has awakened only to a tiny extent will experience a vibration in the crown of their head and a concentration of power between their eyebrows. This does not mean that their Kundalini is fully aroused in them or that she has reached her goal of the highest chakra. As a matter of fact what happens is that a little power rises and then descends. As the Kundalini ascends there is a manifestation of her power and the practitioner gains some siddhis, some amazing powers. It is Kundalini herself who confers such powers on the practitioner so as to distract him from his ultimate quest of perfection, of liberation. Apart from this it must also be borne in mind that, if the Kundalini deviates from her right path, the results can be disastrous: afflictions can be caused, even mental disturbance.

There are many kinds of *Māyā* in this world, and there are many kinds of practices, disciplines, to free ourselves from the same [*Māyā*]. *Kundalini yōga* enables one to grasp the power of *Ambāl*, but she has mixed in it a great deal of *Māyā*. If you ask why, how do we answer it? One crop is easy to cultivate and harvest. Another is difficult to cultivate : you have to find the soil suitable to it; there must be the right climate for it to grow... Why should it be so? Can we answer such a question? All this is part of the many ways in which *Ambāl* enacts the drama of her sport. She has kept the practice of *Kundalini yōga* very hard indeed.

It may be asked: 'Do those who follow the path of devotion or *jnāna* achieve their goal and have a vision of the deity they worship or realise the Self easily?' The question is justified. But the *sāadhanā* adhered to by the followers of the paths of devotion or *jnāna* is not as difficult or as complicated as *Kundalini yōga*. Also, unlike in *Kundalini yōga*, any errors committed in the pursuit of devotion or *jnāna* do not lead to adverse consequences. What the Lord says in the *Gītā* about *karmayoga* [carrying out one's duties and deeds without desiring the fruits thereof] applies to *bhaktiyōga* and *jnānayōga*, but not to what is understood by the very word *yōga*, that is *Kundalini* and the like. The Lord says:

‘*Nehābhikrama-nāśōsthi prathyavāyō na vidhyathe*
Svalpam apyasya dharmasya thrāyathe mahatō bhayāht’

- (II-40)

It means: 'Efforts made in this way (*bhakti* and *jnāna*) will never be futile. Also they will not lead to adverse consequences. Even a little effort will guard us against the terrible fear that we will never have release from worldly existence.' But we see that those who are engaged in the difficult *sāadhanā* of *Kundalini yōga* with all its pitfalls abandon it after reaching one stage or another despairing that they will never succeed in it. Many people

practicing this *yōga* have come to me to tell me about how they despaired of succeeding in it. It means that what the Lord has said about it does happen: '*abhikrama nāsā*', our endeavour becoming futile. In *Kundalini yōga* the practitioner runs the risk of '*pratyavāya*', as mentioned in the *Gītā* verse quoted above, that is adverse consequences, the opposite of what is intended. Till the very end he will be gripped by the fear of whether he will do his *sādhana* properly and be rewarded or whether he will go astray from the right path. In the midst of it all he may acquire is some amazing powers: this also causes the fear whether, as a result, he will be distracted from his true goal of liberation. 'Even a little *sādhana* will dispel fear,' these words of the Lord do not apply to the practice of *Kundalini yōga*.

We must also add to this a point that the Lord does not mention in the above verse. Apart from the fact that the practitioner of *Kundalini yōga* will have the fear whether he will succeed in his *sādhana*, he is likely to be deluded into thinking that he has achieved perfection and won the ultimate fruit of his efforts when he earns only a little benefit in the form of certain powers. Those who follow the path of *bhakti* or *jñāna* cannot be deluded into thinking that they have come face to face with the deity they are worshipping or that they have achieved self-realization. But practitioners of *Kundalini yōga* are misled into believing that they have reached their goal when they are far from it: they mistake the vibrations they feel in a few chakras of the body for the *Kundalini* having awakened fully. It is like believing that one has reached the *sanctum sanctorum* of a temple when one sees the outline of the *gopuram* from a distance.

I do not decry *Kundalini yōga* as a wrong path. It is certainly an excellent road to take one to non-dualistic *samādhi*. Or else great *yōgis* and great seers would not have given us a *sasthra* like it. Above all, would our *Āchāryā* have dealt with it in his hymn? The path is indeed right. But we are not sufficiently qualified to follow

it. Only rare individuals of courage can practice this *yōga*. But there is no need for us to do the same. I make these remarks because I thought I should not speak in vain about a discipline which must be practiced under a guru who has perfected himself in it – and it must be practiced untiringly under his constant guidance.

Why are we assembled here? To think about the way we must follow to make all the efforts possible for us to find the Truth. Why should we, then, waste our time by speaking about efforts we are not capable of making? Not only are such efforts not possible to make, it is also not necessary to make them. There is no inward fullness to be gained by us through *Kundalini yōga* that we cannot achieve through devotion and *jnāna*. So let us not discuss a method that is not only difficult but also unnecessary. If someone asks you the way to go to *Kāñchīpuram*, it is all right to tell him, 'Take a bus from Central bus-station or take a train.' But is there any sense in telling the man, 'There is a tunnel excavated during the reign of the Pallavas connecting a suburb of Chennai with *Kāñchīpuram*. You may go by it.' There may in fact be such a way... There may be a tunnel and there may be people daring enough to go by it. But what is the use of speaking to ordinary people about it?

Sir John Woodroffe was an eminent jurist and Tagore Professor of Calcutta University. He adopted the pseudonym of Arthur Avalon and his pioneering works on Thantra were published in the early decades of the 20th century. Sir John Woodroffe wrote books like *Serpent Power on Kundalini yōga* and what happened? A large number of individuals, claiming to have mastered the *yōga*, conducted classes. Many, without having had any practice in it and without any intention of practicing it, wrote about '*mulādhāra*', '*sahasrāra*' and so on. Among the ordinary people quite a few have come to mouth these words to show that they too are knowledgeable about the subject. Although everybody speaks about chakras, Kundalini and so on, how many practice the *yōga* properly, with the required discipline and

determination? Those who claim to do it, do they have the courage, the strength and the maturity to withstand the great power that will be released? It is a big question whether they can keep up their *sādhana* until the end without being distracted. To speak about such matters without serving any purpose is bunkum. Worse, by practicing the *yōga* wrongly one suffers adverse consequences like hallucinations. That is why I am averse to dealing with the subject. However, since I started with the promise of explaining the stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī* I cannot altogether conceal it from you. Even if I did, you might try to know about it from other sources. That is the reason why I am speaking about it, departing from my original stand. And I am doing so with a warning...

I do not blame Woodroffe. I am in fact thankful to him. 'Yōgic power', 'yōgic attainments, all these are a lie. There is nothing in the world beyond the understanding of our science,' so Westerners had said and Indians who treated their word as the sacred truth agreed. It was Woodroffe who affirmed that such powers and attainments did exist, that they transcended the laws of science, that they indeed constituted a super-science. This opened the eyes of everybody to the system. Had he not written about *Kundalini yōga* even those who were really entitled to practice it would not have even known about it. It had declined to such an extent then. It was only because of the faith inspired in it by the writings of Woodroffe that many were encouraged to learn the *yōga* from *yōgis* who had truly mastered it.. A new bright age dawned then for a system that had become dim. Even today there are *yōgis* who are accomplished adepts; also there are practitioners who learn from them in the proper manner. But there are charlatans too. I spoke about the new bright age that had dawned for the system. But the brightness is all in mere talk--and it hurts. It was in the context of such developments that I said: 'Why

should we waste our time speaking about a system of *yōga* we are not practicing, instead of using it in seeking *Āthmic* well being?’

I wonder whether what I have spoken so far about *Kundalini yōga* has aroused the interest of some of you in it. I must therefore warn you again: ‘You must find a good guru who is truly an adept, who has no gains to make for himself, who takes the utmost care of his disciples and who takes them higher and higher in *sādhana*. You must be assured that you have such a guru, a *sadguru*, if you want to practice *Kaundalini yōga*. You must not try to practice it on your own, nor under such men as those who call themselves *yōgis*--and such persons are to be seen everywhere nowadays. This is a matter that requires the utmost caution.’

Caution is necessary with regard to *manthra yōga* also, though not to the same extent as it is with regard to the practice of *Kundalini yōga*. *Manthra yōga* produces the same results as *Kundalini yōga* and it does so through vibrations in the *nādis*. Initiation by a guru--his *upadēsa* is vital for one who wishes to practice it. For these reasons *manthra Śāsthā* is not to be dealt with in detail except for those who are serious about it and are determined to practice it with faith.

There is no use knowing *manthras* if they have not been taught in the proper manner by a guru. You may have lengths of wire in your house of good quality, also switches and bulbs. But will the bulbs burn if they are not connected to the powerhouse. The power of the guru is similar- it is a live power. Chanting *Manthras* without the one who chants them being connected to the guru (without being initiated by him) is the same.

It does not matter much if *manthras* do not yield any benefits. But if they have not been properly grasped, if their potency has not been well understood? They will then produce results contrary to the expected. I will explain it by modifying the illustration given earlier. Assume that the sounds of the *manthras*

are like electricity. Can we 'handle' it (electric power) ourselves to bring light? If we do so we will get a shock. The teaching called the bulb [the light in it] must come through the wire called the guru. Only then will we obtain light. We do not know the source of the electric power which is transmitted by the wire. Similarly, the mantras also must be learned in secret.

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EXPLAINING THE HYMN BEFORE A PUBLIC ASSEMBLY

During discourses given before a public assembly these subjects (*Kundalini yoga*, *manthra yoga*) must not be elaborated upon but merely hinted at.

There must be two editions of the hymn: the first a popular edition, omitting matters considered a secret (*rahasya*); the second, a limited edition, meant for practitioners of *Kundalini yoga* or of *manthra yoga*, and those who buy or receive copies must be authorised to do so by men of distinction.

This is the age of democracy. It is now widely believed that all subjects, without any distinction, must be brought to the market-place. So I wonder whether my suggestion (of two editions of the hymn) will take root [will be acceptable]. However, since I carry the title of guru it is my duty to make the suggestion and I have made it. Since I can sow the seed I have sown it. It is not in my hands to make it strike root.

The elements of a *Śāsthā* guarded as a secret are to be taught only to sincere *upāsakās*. Similarly, certain descriptions, certain erotic passages, portraying the *nāyakā-nāyaki* (hero-heroine) relationship must be addressed only to 'sahrudhayas', connoisseurs of poetry, of literature. These must not be dwelt upon indiscriminately before a general audience.

However, to ignore or omit altogether references to concepts pertaining to certain disciplines while explaining the stanzas of works like the *Saundaryalaharī* or to ignore passages of poetic beauty dealing with the husband-wife relationship is to take too narrow a view of things. It would mean overlooking profound philosophical truths and poetic ideas and images of great beauty. However, great caution is needed in dwelling on these and one must not go beyond a certain point in revealing their content. Certain passages, superficially read, may seem to be too erotic in flavour or even capable of causing disgust, disagreeable feelings, but they may not be so when examined in depth. Such passages may be explained to an audience without going too much into knotty religious concepts or figures of speech of a difficult nature. When explaining the meaning of stanzas dealing with Kundalini *yōga* one may refer to those parts which inspire devotion to *Ambālī* or contain beautiful descriptions but one must be silent on the points that are to be preserved as a mystery.

When we explain the meaning of the verses of the *Saundaryalaharī* can we avoid references to basic matters like its deity *Ambālī* seated on the *PanchaBrahmāsana*? 'What, sitting on a throne made up of five persons?' it might be asked. Also the five persons [deities] are referred to as five '*prēthās*' (corpses). Can we avoid speaking about such matters? We must point out that there is nothing improper about the *PanchaBrahmāsana*, nothing to arouse disgust, and explain its inner significance.

The *Āchāryā* speaks beautifully about the greatness of *Ambālī*'s feet. 'Do you know what it is, the sacred water laving those feet? It is indeed the Ganga that adorns the head of *Īśvarā* himself,' so he observes. As we meditate on *Ambālī* we must imagine that her feet are placed on our head and that the Ganga resting at them flows into us, into our inner being, and washes away all our sins, all the dirt of our actions, and makes us pure. It is with this idea in mind, that is of pointing a way to purify

ourselves, that the *Āchāryā* has expressed himself so beautifully in portraying the feet of *Ambāl*. Describing the quarrel between lovers is part of the poetic convention in the treatment of the *nāyakā-nāyaki* relationship and we find the same implied, if not openly stated, in this stanza. The *nāyakā*, *Śiva*, falls at the feet of his *nāyaki*, *Ambāl*, to pacify her after a quarrel. It is now, as *Śiva* falls at *Ambāl*'s feet, that the Ganga on his head becomes the sacred water lavng her feet. So much is implied in the stanza. Without mentioning all this how can we explain the verse, referring only to how *Gangāmrutha* becomes the *charaṇāmṛutha* of *Ambāl* [ambrosia of her feet] and how it splashes coolly into our inner being and cleanses it? It is thus that we have to speak about *Śiva* falling at the feet of *Ambāl*. But, in doing so, care must be taken to interpret it in such a way that the immature do not understand it in any perverse sense. The thing we must do is to ask people to draw a lesson from this about what desire has done even to such a one as *Śiva*. 'We must be warned against an evil like it,' this is the message we must try to convey.

The devotee, the poet and the jester are licensed to speak freely. A jester can make fun of his king and queen openly, right in the royal assembly. The devotee and the poet can take liberties with the Lord. A poet who is also a devotee--the *Āchāryā* here was one such--can, in an attitude of devotion and from the poetic angle, say things that we must not say or we are reluctant to say: it is so because of the freedom enjoyed by him from time immemorial in a civilized society like ours. If we are humble and try to understand what they say with an open mind and in the spirit of a connoisseur, we will be able to accept it as right and be happy about it. They, the devotee and the poet, speak ill of a god when they mean to praise him [this is called 'nindhāsthuthi'], make fun of him, create differences between a god and his consort, depicting one as being superior or inferior to the other, and incite quarrels between them. All this must not be taken amiss by us even if we do

not appreciate the same. We must at least accept that from their point of view what they do is right.

The reason why I say all this is that the very first verse of the hymn will seem strange to those who do not have sahrudhaya-bhāva towards its author.

‘*Śiva* is the husband, *Ambāl* is the wife. It is by her power that he is activated,’ says the first stanza of the hymn. This means it is the wife that controls the husband, that the Lord himself has come under the sway of his wife. If she is not associated with him he will be ‘useless’. This [such an interpretation] does not seem right. ‘Should the Lord be lowered in this manner simply because *Ambāl* is to be exalted at the beginning itself?’ Those who are lacking in sahrudhayathvam are likely to take such a distorted view. It is because I wanted them not to do so that I spoke about how things said in expounding certain concepts or descriptions dictated by poetic imagination are to be taken by the reader.

What is the meaning of the concept here (of the first stanza)? The quiescent Brahman, without any function, is activated by the power of chith. I told you that for one to have awareness of oneself, to know oneself as ‘I’, is also a function. Since according to the poetic convention also the *nāyakā* is submissive to the *nāyaki*, we must accept the view that *Śiva* is activated by *Ambāl*.

Apart from the explanations offered on these two planes, if the *Śiva-Śakthi* principle is interpreted on the basis of science it would sound more convincing to people.

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THE ŚĀKTHA SYSTEM AND SCIENCE

Let us examine on the basis of science the statement that the quiescent *Śiva* is activated and involved in work by *Ambāl*... ‘*Padhārtha*’ or ‘substance’ is called ‘matter’. Its character or

nature is inertness, that is it is without the power of action or motion. We often come across the phrase 'inert matter'. We know that the cosmos has come into being by inert matter set in motion in various ways and occurring in various combinations. Does this not mean that there is a certain power that activates matter that is inert? Matter that is inert is *Śiva* and the power that activates it is *Śakthi*.

Śiva, who is quiescent and motionless, and *Śakthi* that keeps everything pulsating, from the planets and stars to the atom, are inseparably united. In terms of science *Śiva* can be called matter and *Śakthi* energy. Not only are *Śiva* and *Śakthi* inseparably united they are in fact basically the same. This is confirmed by atomic science according to which matter becomes energy.

But there is a difference, a big difference. According to science, matter will cease to exist after it is converted into energy. But *Śiva* and *Śakthi* exist as eternal truths. When *Śakthi* is manifested as energy, the matter that is *Śiva* is not annihilated. This is so because matter here is not insentient but a living spirit; it remains as the *Ātmā* that is not destroyed, that cannot be destroyed. Indeed it exists as a living force, as chaitanya. Even the matter that science speaks of, matter that is inert to start with and ends in inertness, is born out of this chaitanya. Today geniuses in science like Albert Einstein, (1879-1955), the tallest among modern scientists; Sir Oliver Lodge, astronomer, who became a champion of 'spiritualism'; and Sir Arthur Eddington, (1882-1944), distinguished astronomer, are gradually turning science towards chaitanya, viewing it from the basis of chaitanya. But this cannot be proved or experienced in the laboratory. It can be proved or experienced only through religious practice and observances.

While there are differences between science and religion, there are many points on which the two agree. The discoveries

made in nuclear science arising out of Einstein's Theory of Relativity come close particularly to the ideas propounded by Adhvaitha Vēdhāntha and the *Śāktha* system.

Nothing in the world exists as a truth on its own, as an absolute entity; this applies to time and space also. Everything is dependent on something else and all are part of a continuum, though each appears as a truth by itself in the empirical world. This is what I understand of the Theory of Relativity. The Brahman is the one fundamental Truth. According to Adhvaitha all the world is based on it, as its reflection, manifested by *Māyā*. I said that the *Śāktha* texts spoke of this *Māyā* as *Ambāl*. Is there not room to think that the concept of *Māyā* is the same as the Theory of Relativity? Science has not discovered the truth that is Absolute. Religious and philosophical texts call the Absolute the Brahman, *Siva*. (Though religion and philosophy are regarded as two separate disciplines, for us the two are inseparable: they are like *Siva* and *Sakthi*.) This Absolute is not something to be found only in books; it is a truth that is realised by great men as the *Āthmā*. It is the life of all life, indeed the only true Life.

Science has not spoken of this Absolute yet. Even if one day scientists come to accept this truth on a theoretical basis, they will have to admit that the proof of the same is beyond their capacity. They will have to tell people, 'Go and learn about it from the science of the *Āthmā*'. Science can only partly explain the drama enacted by *Parāśakthi* through her vibrations or motions and derive rules from it. It cannot have a unified view of these vibrations, all those vibrations that keep the mind of the individual Self pulsating and show the way to keep it still and tranquil and realise itself as the Absolute. Anyway, this is not the aim of science, to point the way to Self-realisation. That way will be shown by religious texts. But, even if they do so, even if we advance by this way, it is *Ambāl* who will keep the ultimate goal

open for us. She it is who separates us from the Absolute in her sport; that being so who else can again unite us with It?

It is wrong on our part to speak about the failure of science to understand things beyond its frontiers. At the same time, scientists themselves must realise that there are limitations to science. They are also not justified in saying that the disciplines dealing with things beyond it, that is beyond science, are false. Both sides (science and religion) must believe that the two are complementary, that the one compensates for what is lacking in the other. If we examine how the truths discovered by science are expressed in a different language in some of the concepts propounded by our *Śāstrās* we will come across many an interesting fact.

For example, we may take it that the positively charged proton in the nucleus of the atom is *Śiva* and that the negatively charged electron is *Ambāl*. The point at which the weight of an object is kept even on its two sides, maintained in equilibrium, is to be known as one of tranquillity. It is the centre of gravity. Even a terrible storm has a centre, 'storm centre'. It is from a calm centre that power emanates and spreads, that power manifests itself or even explodes--and matter, objects, are created and functions are performed with force. This calm centre is *Śiva* and the entity that emanates from the centre and revolves round it is *Ambāl*.

What is at the centre of a thing is positive and what revolves round it is negative: the two are *Śiva* and *Ambāl*. Since it is not stated that the two are equal or that they function together, there is another way in which *Śiva* and *Ambāl* are looked at. That is instead of saying that *Śiva* is at the centre and *Ambāl* revolves round him, the two are said to be half and half of the same entity. That is *Ardhanārīśvarā*--the right side that is positive is *Śiva* and the left side that is negative is *Ambāl*. There is an important reason

for saying so. Is not the heart in the left side? It is what gives strength to the entire body. If it does not function properly the right side also will not function well. '*Na khalu spandhithumapi*' (it will not be able even to stir).

There is something interesting about this. The heart is in the left side and it gives strength to the entire body. But it is the right side that is stronger; it has more 'power' to do work. The right hand lends itself to greater use than the left one. Children amuse themselves with what is (literally 'lame play') in which the left leg is kept raised and the right leg supports the body. There is a song which says that the left leg not being useful Nataraja supports himself with his right leg.

An idea is implied here: that it is *Ambāl* who gives strength to the body. If we see what controls the functions of the right and left sides of the body, we will see that the functions of the right side are controlled by the left side of the brain and those of the left side of the body by the right side of the brain. That means the '*Śiva* side' of our body which performs functions with greater power is controlled by the *Śakthi* side of the brain.

In this *Ambāl's* *pāthivrathya* is beautifully revealed. Although it is she who imparts power to her husband, she shows him to be stronger. His dance of deluge (*pralaya thāndhava*) makes all the cosmos tremble—it has such awesome power. Such force is revealed not only in the dance of deluge; *Śiva's* dance of bliss (*ānanda thāndava*) is such as to make all the eight cardinal points of space tremble and shake, so says *Gopala-Krishṇa Bhārati* in one of his compositions. Such power is demonstrated not only by *Śiva's* action. If he beats the earth with his matted locks, a *Vīrabhadra* will arise.... Listening to the accounts of his deeds in the *Purāṇās* we still tremble with fear. With one blow of his hand he can knock out the teeth of even the Sun God. If *Paramēśvarā* so much as

laughs once, more power will be released than the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and it can reduce the Thripuras to ashes. It is Ambikā who imparts such power to her husband.

‘*Śakthi*’ is the name of a female deity. It is therefore outrageous that women should be called ‘*abalās*’ and suppressed by men. Those who think so must consider this. The *Śāstrās*, according to which *Śakthi* is feminine, also have it that *Parāśakthi* has on her own come under the sway of *Paramēśvarā* and that she shows by her example that such submissiveness to the husband is what lends added beauty to women. It must also be noted that the *Śāstrās* do not say that *Parāśakthi* gave *Paramēśvarā* more power in order to keep her under his control. This is seen illustrated at Chidambaram (at the Nataraja temple). As said before, Panchakruthya is under the control of *Ambāl*. But here [at *Chidambāram*] she has assigned it to Nataraja and she herself remains utterly serene, without our knowing where she is.

I said that *Śakthi* dwelt in the same body as that of *Śiva*; he, her husband, is in the right side and she herself is in the left side. But being there she gives greater strength to the right side. The right side is called ‘*dakṣiṇa bhāga*’ and the left side ‘*vāma bhāga*’. ‘*Dakṣiṇa*’ means ‘skilful’, ‘able’ and the term is apt for the right side. ‘*vāma*’ means beautiful. ‘It is on this theme, that the essential characteristic of *Ambāl* is her beauty, that the *Āchāryā* has composed his *Saundaryalaharī*. And, appropriately enough, hers is the left side which mainly denotes beauty. She is called *Śakthi* but she has made her husband more powerful remaining herself more beautiful than anyone, or anything, else.

Śiva is still and *Śakthi* is the one who activates him. But an idea contrary to this is conveyed by the Sanskrit words ‘*dakṣiṇa*’ and ‘*vāma*’ denoting the right side that is his and the left side that is hers.

The Tamil word '*Valam*' for right is derived from '*balam*' (strength). '*Idam*' ('left' in tamil) is place (where a person or thing stands), 'station'. The word 'stationary' itself means 'not moving'. In English these meanings are taken one step further. It is said that the root from which 'left' is derived means 'paralysis'. 'Left' denotes weakness; 'right' means the same as 'straight', 'perpendicular'. This meaning becomes clear in the term 'right angle'. Only when he is strong can a man stand upright. When he is weak he lies crouching or he develops a stoop. When yōgic postures are taught in order to strengthen the body and the mind, the first lesson is '*Uthānāsana*', the erect posture. So the idea that 'right' is strong and 'left' is weak and unmoving is at variance with the *Śiva-Śakthi* concept according to which *Śiva* is assigned the right side and *Śakthi* the left side. It seems to suggest that *Ambāl*, the great pathivrathā that she is, has transferred all her power to *Śiva* and, remaining without any action herself, has gone to her husband for refuge.

Though the root meanings of 'left' and 'right' are as described above, in politics they seem to have different connotations. Leftist parties stand for change, for revolution, while rightists are called conservatives who adhere to the path of peace. Here the right side represents the tranquillity of *Śiva* while the left side represents the throbbing, the pulsation, of *Śakthi*. The meanings in the context of politics are very apt.

I have brought in politics along with philosophy, poetics and science; it is only by having recourse to different ways of explanation that the meaning of a subject, the idea behind it, will make a deep impact on the mind.

Another point to be noted on this subject of left and right is this. The right side of an object becomes the left side of its reflected image: similarly the left side becomes its right side. According to Adhvaitha the *Nirguṇa* Brahman, as it is reflected in the *Māyā* mirror, becomes the *Saguṇa* Brahman that rules the

dualistic world. Which means it is *Śiva* himself who becomes *Ambāl* as he is reflected in the *Māyā* mirror. Do not ask questions about this *Māyā*, because it is not possible at all to say what it is. After all, it creates magic, creates illusions. How can we comprehend it? According to the *Śāktha* system, *Māyā* is *Ambāl*, an aspect of *Ambāl*. I said earlier that in this system it is when *Śiva* is manifested as the individual Self that *Māyā* appears. It is *Māyā* that keeps the individual Self under a daze without its being aware that it is indeed *Śiva*. The function of *Māyā*, *Māyā-Śakthi*, is to conceal the eternal and real entity that is *Śiva* and reveal the transient and non-real objects as real to the individual Self.

Here the object and its reflected image again lead us to the subject of the positive and the negative. The positive and negative categories mentioned before belong to electricity. Now I am going to speak about positive and negative in photography. In the positive, light will be seen as light and shade (that is what is dark will be seen as shade as in the original image). In the negative the light will be seen as shade and the shade will be seen as light: Here is the work of *Māyā*: what is real is revealed as unreal and what is unreal is revealed as real: it is all due to the nescience created by *Māyā*. Now we are floundering in the deep pit of darkness and since *Ambāl* is responsible for it we call her *Māyā*.

But we must not forget one fact. Let me repeat what I said before. *Ambāl* who creates the illusion that the unreal is real will one day, out of her supreme compassion, make the unreal truly unreal and unite us with the real. If we go to her as our only refuge and grasp her feet, I mean mentally, without ever relaxing our hold, and pray for release she will surely bless us with liberation.

As I say this, there is another point that emerges in the positive negative theme. What do the two terms mean? 'Positive' means that which exists, that which is real: it denotes 'Yes'. Negative means that which does not exist, that which is not real.

However good or attractive the sport of *Śākthi* is, it can never be the eternal truth. So we are justified in describing her as negative. It is the tranquillity that is *Śiva* which is the eternal truth. So *Śiva* is positive. However, *Ambāl* or *Śākthi*, who is the basis of all that is negative, is also instrumental in uniting us with the positive.

There may be matters that are not acceptable to all but that may be made acceptable by explaining them in terms of science and philosophy or by interpreting them in accordance with poetic convention or tradition. But there are passages dealing with manthras, thanthras and yanthras and also certain poetic descriptions which should not be dealt with before a general audience. While explaining the meaning of a hymn like the *Saundaryalaharī* whose very purpose is to take us to a high realm it would be an offence against *Ambāl* as well as the *Āchāryā* if we were to dwell upon ideas that are of no use to the listeners or that cause undesirable thoughts in their minds.

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THE FIRST STANZA: WHAT IT TEACHES

‘Without being united with you, can *Śiva* even stir?’ so asks the *Āchāryā* at the very beginning of his hymn. But what is the inner meaning of his statement, or the lesson it contains, or its teaching? It occurs to me that the *Āchāryā* seems to say to *Ambāl* on our behalf, ‘Without your compassion can we reach that state of stillness (of *Śiva*)?’ *Ambāl* is the Great Power that moves what does not move. Her sport starts with the vibration that makes the *Parabrahmam* aware of its own existence.

According to the first stanza, the first vibration by which the *Parabrahmam* becomes aware of Itself is caused by *Ambāl*. Thereafter it is vibration after vibration, movement after movement, ending with the vibrations of our own daily life. These vibrations, originating in the *Brahmam* and ending with the world

of living beings, are in a descending order ('*avarōhaṇā*'); that is they descend step by step and are mentioned in different *Śāstrās* as 36 or 24 *thathvas* and so on. This *avarōhaṇā* is called 'evolution'. No, it is not the evolution according to Darwin. He speaks of the species evolving into higher and higher orders. Here it is a matter of descent from the highest peak of the Brahman down to us humans. The Brahman turning outward and countless entities evolving from it: this process is called 'evolution'. Each individual attaining his state of the Brahman is *mōksha* or liberation. Thus all those revealed outwardly from the Brahman and going inward again is *arohana* or ascent. From the Brahman down to the individual (or the individual Self) is '*avarōhaṇā*' or descent; from the individual (the individual Self) to the Brahman is *arohana* or ascent. *Ārōhaṇā* is the ascending order similar to the notes in music, *sa ri ga ma pa dha ni*. *Avarōhaṇā* is in the descending order-*sa ni dha pa ma ga ri*. From the Brahman in the upper *sa* descending to *ri* is the individual Self; for the individual to obtain liberation he will have to go up to *sa* after passing through *ga ma pa dha ni*. Better than the words 'descending' and 'ascending', it seems to me are 'unfolding' and 'folding'. The Brahman, becoming outward are unfolding itself into the universe and the living beings, is evolution. The living beings caused by the unfolding have to turn inward and become the Brahman. This process is aptly denoted by the word 'involution'.

What had unfolded have to fold again and end with the root base or *mūlādhāra*. For this process we have to exert ourselves. But that alone will not be enough. That the great entity called the Brahman has evolved into us is not something that has been accomplished by ourselves but by the sport of *Ambāl*, her *līlā*. So how can we, by our efforts alone, become the Brahman again? It is true that, in the drama she conducts with individual souls, she has given us a part in which we have to undergo much trouble and exert ourselves in many ways, but that does not mean that we can

by ourselves achieve liberation, attain the state of the Brahman. Through her grace alone can we reach this ultimate goal. The force that has thrust us outward, the same force has to thrust us inward. If you want the fan to work you have to switch it on. It does not stop on its own. Can anybody stop it by holding on to its blades? To stop it, it has to be switched off: the same button that you pressed to switch it on must be pressed again to switch it off.

Ambāl is the cause of *Śiva*'s evolution [into the universe and all living beings]. But there is the other side of the coin of what the *Āchāryā* says at the very beginning of his hymn. If *Ambāl* is the cause of the evolution of *Śiva* into the individual souls she must also be the cause of the involution of these souls, their becoming *Śiva* again. For this we must pray constantly for her compassion. We must take it that the *Āchāryā*, through the words of his hymn, teaches us to pray for her grace to bring about our involution into *Śiva*.

I said that *Ambāl* has cast us in a role in which we have to exert ourselves in various ways. What are these efforts? And how are they to be made? The different kinds of efforts include karma or works, and the paths of devotion, *jnāna* and *yōga*. Among these the *Āchāryā* shows the easiest and happiest path, that of devotion (*bhakti pārāyaṇa*) through his *Saundaryalaharī*.

How do we make an inaccessible entity accessible to us? We must imagine it in a compassionate form and it will be within our reach. This attitude towards a deity is devotion or *bhakti*. Among the various *rasas* of love, among its many sweetnesses, is *vāthsalya*, the affection of a mother for her children. The *Āchāryā* mingles *vāthsalya* with the aesthetics of poetry in this hymn. If it is the Mother who showers her love called *vāthsalya* on all her children, there must also be father (to go with the mother). That is why, right at the beginning of the hymn, the *Āchāryā* uses the words '*Sivah Sakthya*', thus bringing before us for our *dharsan* the

Mother-Father pair. In doing so he shows how exalted *Ambāl* is by depicting her as the Mother who gives strength to the Father.

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COSMIC FUNCTIONS WITH THE DUST ON AMBĀL'S FEET

Thanīyāmsam pāmsuṁ thava charaṇaṁ pankēruha-bhavam
Virinchih sanchinvan virachayathi lokānavikalam
Vahathyēnam Saurih kathamapi sahasrēṇa śirasām
Harah samkshudyainam bhajathi bhasitho ddhulanavidhim

This is the second stanza. The first stanza said: '*Hari-Hara-Virinchadhibhirapi ārādhyām*' (*Ambāl* who is worshipped even by Hari, Hara, Virincha and others--that is by *Vishṇu*, Rudra, Brahma and others). This idea is elaborated here. If the Thrimurthi carry out their important functions of creation, sustenance and dissolution, they owe it to a trickle of *Ambāl*'s compassion.

It seems Brahma creates all these worlds out of a speck of dust from the feet of *Ambāl*. '*Pāmsu*' means dust on the feet. Even in such dust there are some particles that are finer than others. The *Āchāryā* uses the word '*thanīyāmsam*' here to denote such particles of dust. When the entire *Śakthi* of the *Parabrahmam* assumes a form, is personified, a speck of dust on her feet is sufficient source material (root substance) to create the fourteen worlds. So much for the subject of creation.

Then protection or sustenance. Ananta or *Ādhishesha* on whom *Vishṇu* reclines is himself an aspect of *Vishṇu*, who is called *Ananthapadmanābha*. He who sustains the worlds supporting them with his one thousand heads, these worlds are only a speck of dust on the sole of *Ambāl*'s foot. Here *Vishṇu* is called *Śauri*. The deity at *Tirukkanāpuram* (in Tamil Nadu) is known as *Śauriraja*. *Krishṇa Paramātmā* is called '*Śauri*' because he is the grandson (son's son) of *Sūra* of the *Yādava* clan. This name would be apt for

Balarama also. Being the elder brother of *Krishṇa* the name is more justified in his case: he is also one of the ten *avatārās* of *Vishṇu*, and is, besides, said to be an *avatārā* of *Śeṣha*. So there is nothing wrong in describing *Mahā Vishṇu* as *Śeṣha* and in saying that he supports the worlds with his one thousand heads. The very first word of the '*Purushasūkta*', which is a hymn to *Purushōttama*, the Lord, means that he possesses one thousand heads, '*Sahasraśirsha*'.

The direct or literal meaning of the statement that *Vishṇu* supports the worlds with his heads is that he keeps them stable without their rolling away. But the inner meaning is that he sustains them, protects them. The *Āchāryā* says that *Vishṇu* performs this function '*kathamapi*', somehow. It is a difficult task but *Vishṇu* carries it out somehow. Brahma accomplishes the work of creation with the dust from the sole of *Ambāl*'s foot. While mentioning this the *Āchāryā* does not use the term '*kathamapi*'. Nor does he use it when he refers to Rudra destroying the worlds. He uses the phrase only in the context of *Vishṇu* sustaining them. Creation is a function that is accomplished in a brief time. Destruction takes even less time. Is it not easier to destroy a thing than to make it? But protecting the world is a task that lasts an extremely long period, yugas, even kalpas. So only in this context, of *Vishṇu* supporting the worlds for aeons, does the *Āchāryā* use the phrase '*kathamapi*'.

To carry on one's head the dust from the feet of the great is considered right and proper, indeed a matter of great good fortune. *Mahā Vishṇu* carries on his head the dust from the feet of *Ambāl*, the dust that means all the fourteen worlds.

If *Vishṇu* holds the dust from *Ambāl*'s feet on his head, *Īśvarā* smears it all over his body in the form of ashes. The dust on *Ambāl*'s feet, we saw, became the fourteen worlds. During the

time of dissolution *Īsvarā* pulverises these worlds into powder and smears the same all over his body thinking to himself, 'The source of the fourteen worlds was the dust from *Ambāl's* feet, so the fourteen worlds reduced to powder is the dust from *Ambāl's* feet.

Ambāl's feet are a bright red; so the dust on them must also be the same colour. When *Vēdhamāthā* (*Mother Vēdha*) prostrates herself before *Ambāl*, keeping her head at the goddess's feet, the red dust sticks in the parting of her (*Vēdhamāthā's*) hair as kumkuma. This idea is conveyed by the name included in the *Lalitha-Sahasranāmam*, 'Śruthi-sīmantasindūrikrutha-pāda-bjadhūlikā.' A speck of that kumkuma becomes the fourteen worlds and during the great deluge it is turned into sacred ashes (*vibhūti*). It is customary to offer devotees the sacred ashes as *Śiva's prasāda* and kumkuma as *Ambāl's prasāda*. Here the kumkuma itself has become the sacred ashes for *Īsvarā*.

After stating in the first stanza that the Thrimurthi worship her, their functions are mentioned in this, the second stanza. So the truth is implied here that it is as a result of their worship of *Ambāl* that the three gods have become capable of performing their functions.

* * *

CAN WE START WITH THE FEET?

The first stanza is like a 'mangala śloka' [signifying an auspicious beginning]. The text proper, we may say, starts with the second stanza, and it is a glorification of the dust on *Ambāl's* feet.

'Does not the portrayal of male deities start with the feet? In the case of female deities is it not customary to start the verbal depiction from the head? Why is it different here?' Such questions may arise in the minds of people.

It is only when the entire physical form of a deity is described part by part that the 'pādhādhikēsa' order is observed for a male deity and the 'kēsādhīpādhā' order observed for a female deity. In the 'Ānandalahari' section of the hymn there are no stanzas describing the physical form from the feet upward. It is in the latter section called 'Saundaryalaharī' that we have a description of the physical form of *Ambāl* : here the portrayal starts, according to the convention, with the crown and ends with the feet.

When there is no complete description of the physical form of a deity, male or female, the feet must be grasped first. When you go to a deity for refuge you fall at his or her feet. Initiation is given by a deity in the form of a guru by placing his or her foot on the head of the devotee. *Ambāl* is the mother of mothers, the guru of gurus. So whether we go to her for refuge crying 'Mother' or look upon her as our guru and pray for dhiksha (initiation) we have to hold her feet. So it is proper that the hymn commences in this manner [the *Āchāryā*, so to speak, grasping *Ambāl*'s feet].

We must also consider the fact that, if *Śiva* is united with *Śakti*, it naturally means that *Śakti* is also united with *Śiva*. Since they are one in the form of *Ardhanarīśvarā*, describing *Śiva* from head to foot is also justified. The *Āchāryā* has composed a hymn in this manner. Similarly, following the same logic, *Ambāl* can also be described from foot to head in the same manner. We may take it that in this way the 'inseparableness of *Śiva* and *Ambāl*' is implied.

The next two stanzas also dwell on the glory of *Ambāl*'s feet. After dealing with the greatness of the dust on the soles of her sacred feet, the *Āchāryā* goes on to portray the greatness of her sacred feet themselves.

* * *

THE DUST ON AMBĀL'S FEET IT DOES GOOD HERE AND HEREAFTER

The third stanza mentions how the dust on the sacred feet of *Ambāl* brings us her grace in many ways. After stating in the second stanza that it is through this dust that all cosmic functions are carried out, the *Āchāryā* says here how it brings blessings to all living beings and how it bestows grace on us by freeing us from worldly existence.

Avidhyānām anthasthimira-mihira-dvīpanagari

‘Avidhyā’ means ‘*ajnāna*’ (nescience). It is a fearful kind of darkness, what is called ‘*timira*’ in the stanza. The darkness of *ajnāna* conceals the self-luminous *Ātmā* that is within. For *ajnānis* the dust on *Ambāl*’s feet sheds the light of *jñāna* that is like a shining chithy situated where the sun rises. ‘*Mihira*’ means the sun and ‘*dvīpanagari*’ denotes a city on an island. When you look at the rising sun you would think it emerges from an island in the sea.

Would it not be sufficient to say that the dust on the feet of *Ambāl* is the sun dispelling the darkness of *ajnāna*? Why should mention be made of the city on the island over which the sun rises? There is another version of the stanza for those who ask such a question. The relevant line is: ‘*thimiramihirōddīpanagari*’ (‘*thimira-mihira-uddīpanagari*’). ‘*Uddīpana*’ is to make something brighter. If you follow this text, the meaning would be: ‘The sun that dispels the inner darkness of *ajnāna* and makes the light of *jñāna* brighter.’

Let us consider the two terms, ‘*saprapancha*’ and ‘*nishprapancha*’. The *Saguṇa* Brahman that is associated with cosmic matters is ‘*saprapancha*’. ‘*Nishprapancha*’ is the *Nirguṇa* Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, that is without the *Māyā* that is the cause of the *prapancha* or the universe. In the previous stanza *Ambāl* was shown as the *Saguṇa Brahman*: the dust on her feet, it

was mentioned, was the cause of creation, sustenance and destruction. In this stanza she is depicted as the *Nirguṇa* Brahman, the light of the sun that dispels the darkness of *Māyā*.

The doctrine of Adhvaitha would repeatedly come to the *Āchāryā*'s mind, even in the midst of composing a work of devotion. He would then at once tell himself: 'Am I not composing a hymn for people with a dualistic attitude? So, though it is necessary to point to the ultimate goal of Adhvaitha here and there, I should not elaborate upon it.' Thus he reduces the pitch to the dualistic level. That is how here, after speaking about dispelling the darkness of avidhyā, he speaks about all those things that people hanker after in this world like intelligence and prosperity.

Avidhyā grips all except the great who have awareness of the *Ātmā*. Even people of high intelligence, 'clever' people, are not free from it. After stating that the dust from the feet of *Ambāl* takes one to great heights by banishing nescience and bestowing the light of *Ātmic* awareness, the *Āchāryā* says that, as a next step, it gives to the dull-witted, dualistic *jnāna* of a high order that illumines their intelligence.

Jadānām chaitanya-sṭhabaka-makaranda-Sruthijharī

'*Jadānām*' means 'for those who are so dull-witted as to resemble inert objects', people with their knowledge or awareness dried up. In this state of theirs the dust on *Ambāl*'s feet creates a fountain of honey that splashes inside them and makes them green [as opposed to their former dryness]. 'Makaranda Sruthijhari' means honey cascading. Honey or nectar is found in a flower, is it not? What is the flower here? 'Chaitanya sṭhabakam', the bouquet of living knowledge. Chaitanya is nothing but the supreme *jnāna* called 'chith'. For the dull-witted the same becomes the cluster of flowers that splashes nectar and creates the light of intelligence in them.

The term 'chaithanya kusumam' occurs in the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*. 'Kusumam' means 'flower'. In Kālahasti, *Ambāl* is called '*Jnānapūṅkodhai*' (Garland of *Jnāna*). Chaitanya is the offering of libation to *Ambāl*. It is the flower with which she is worshipped. We have these two names for *Ambāl* in the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*: '*Chaitanyārghya-samārādhyā*' and '*Chaitanya-kusumapriyā*'. Together with them occur the names, '*Sadōdhitha*' and '*Tarunadhitya-patala*'. 'She who is always bright like daybreak' is '*Sadhōdhitha*'; and 'she who is red like the light of the morning sun' is '*tharunādhithya-pātalā*'. The *Āchāryā*, it is likely, has used terms like '*thimira-mihira-dvīpanagari*' and '*chaithanya-sthabakam*' inspired by the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*.

If the *Āchāryā* is reminded of the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam* in his *Saundaryalaharī*, *Mūka* is reminded in his *Panchasathī* of the words of the *Āchāryā* himself. *Mūka*, in the very first stanza of his *Panchasathī* calls *Ambāl* 'Parachidhrūpa'. That chith itself takes the form of compassion and *Mūka* likens it to 'Kashmira sthabakam', a cluster of saffron flowers, so tender and beautiful. It is like a creeper that entwines itself round the *Kāmakōti Pīta* of *Kāñchīpuram*.

Karaṇa -parachidhrūpā kāñchīpurasīmni kāmapiṭāgathā

Kāchana viharathi karuṇā Kāshmīra-sthabaka-kōmaḷāṅgalathā

Knowledge and wealth are what people usually hanker after. After referring to the dust on the feet of *Ambāl* that imparts the light of knowledge to people, the *Āchāryā* speaks of the same bestowing wealth also:

Daridhrāṇām chinthāmanigūṇanikā

Chinthāmaṇi, which has an aspect of the divine, grants all one's wishes. Europeans speak of the philosopher's stone but it is different and is more like our 'sparsa-vēdhi'; when it comes into contact with an object, brass, lead or iron, it will convert it into

gold.[or silver]. All it can do is to transmute a metal into gold. *Chinthāmaṇi* is different: it fulfils our desires, creates whatever we desire.

Kāmadhēnu, Kalpakavruksha, *Chinthāmaṇi*-these three are wishfulfilling. *Chinthāmaṇi* is like stone, earth, belonging to the category of insentient objects. Kalpakavruksha has elements of both categories, jada and *chēthana* (insentient and sentient), and belongs to flora. Flora take in water and grow roots and branches. Since they propagate themselves they belong to the *chētana* category. But, all the same, they are rooted to a place and since they do not have feelings and urges like humans and animals they also belong to the jada or insentient category. *Kāmadhēnu* is all *chēthana*, sentient. In physical form she is a cow but in wisdom she is superior even to human beings since she exists on a divine plane. The three, *Chinthāmaṇi*, Kalpaka tree and *Kāmadhēnu* belong respectively to the mineral kingdom, vegetable kingdom and animal kingdom.

The dust on the feet of *Ambāl* is the *Chinthāmaṇi* that grants all the wealth desired by the poor. '*Chinthāmaṇi-guṇānikā*': '*guṇānika*' means 'garland'.

Later in the *Saundaryalaharī* there is a reference to men who are extremely fortunate telling the beads made of *Chinthāmaṇi* gems. Their rosaries are like the ones in which *rudrākshas* and crystals are strung together and they keep muttering the mantras that invoke *Ambāl*: '*Bhajanthithvām Chinthāmaṇi-guṇānibaddhā-kshavalayāh*.' There is a mention of *Kāmadhēnu* also in the stanza. The great men who perform the sacrificial rite chanting the mantras invoking *Ambāl* do not use ordinary ghee but ghee obtained from the milk of *Kāmadhēnu*: '*Śivā gṇau juhvanthah Surabhighrutha-dhārāhuthisathaih*.' '*Surabhighrutha*' is ghee obtained from the milk of *Kāmadhēnu*, *Surabhi* being another name of *Kāmadhēnu*.

A single *Chinthāmaṇi* is enough to grant all one's wishes. Since what *Ambālī* gives is many times more than what we ask for, the rosary is said to have been made of many *Chinthāmaṇis* strung together.

The *Āchāryā* refers to Kalpakavruksha also in one of the stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī*, that too as part of the glorification of *Ambālī*'s feet. He says that like Kalpaka there are four other celestial trees that grant all one's wishes ('*tharūnām dhivyānām*'). *Pārijātha* and *Mandhāra* are two. Since *Mandhāra* grants all the desires of the devout it is described as '*sritha-janamandāra*'. This phrase occurs in many a devotional hymn. *Santhāna* and *Harichandana* are the other two celestial trees.

*Panchaithe devatharavō Mandhārah Pārijāthākah
Santhānah kalpavrukshascha pumsi va harichandanam*

'The five celestial trees like Kalpaka fulfil the wishes of only those who stand in their shade, and only during the time they stand under them. And they do so with their hands which are the tender leaves sprouting at the end of their branches. And only the denizens of the celestial world can stand under these trees. But what about *Ambālī*'s sacred feet? They fulfil the wishes of all people and at all times including the poor living in hovels in remote places,' observes the *Āchāryā*. Here he brings in the vegetable kingdom, reference to which is left out in the third stanza.

The dust on *Ambālī*'s feet (according to the third stanza) is the light of the rising sun that dispels nescience, the vital nectar that removes the inertness of objects and the *Chinthamani* that banishes poverty.

What else does the dust do? For us what is important is becoming learned and prosperous. But for the *Āchāryā*-it is different: he wants all of us to be freed from nescience and from worldly existence. The *Āchāryā* first mentions (Stanza 3) freedom

from the darkness of nescience and concludes the stanza with the mention of freedom from the cycle of birth and death. In the middle two lines, though he brings in intelligence (or learning) and prosperity, he mentions in the first and last line, as guards so to speak, cessation of nescience. '*Daridhrāṇām Chinthāmarī guṇānikā*': after saying this he concludes the stanza, with, '*janmajaladhau nīmaghnāṇām dhamsthutha Murāripu-varāhasya bhavathi*'. '*Janma jaladhi*' is the same as what Tiruvalluvar calls the great ocean of birth. It is also the same as what Apparsvāmigal describes as the great ocean that is false and illusory the ocean of birth and death. We are totally immersed in it. '*Nīmaghnāṇām*' means 'for those who are immersed'. What is the dust on the feet of *Ambāl* for those who are immersed in the ocean of worldly existence? It is '*Murāripu-varāhasya dhamshtra bhavathi*': It is the tusk of the Boar incarnation of *Mahā Vishṇu*. What does this mean, being the tusk of the Boar incarnation?

You will see among sculptures one showing *Bhūvarūhaswāmi* bearing the Goddess Earth on his tusk. Hiranyāksha stole Goddess Earth and hid her in the ocean. Then the Lord took the incarnation of the Boar and penetrating deep into the ocean scooped up Goddess Earth with his beautiful tusk and brought her up carrying her on his tusk itself. Similarly, the dust on the feet of *Ambāl* is the Boar's tusk that takes us up from the ocean of birth and death:

To denote *Vishṇu*'s Boar incarnation the *Āchāryā* uses the term '*Murāripuvarāham*'. *Vishṇu* got the name of *Murāripu* (foe of Mura) from the fact that he slew the demon Mura. *Murāri* also means the same. [Both 'ripu' and 'ari' mean opponent, enemy.] Mura was a companion of *Narakāsura*. *Krishṇa* killed them both, *Narakāsura* and also Mura who had come to his help. Instead of any of the names of *Mahā Vishṇu* proper, the *Āchāryā* uses the names the god came to have during his incarnation as *Krishṇa*-

Śauri in the previous stanza and *Muraripu* in this. This lends strength to the belief that he has a special fondness for the *Krishṇa* incarnation.

* * *

ABHAYA NOT GRANTED BY THE HAND

In the next stanza (4) also the *Āchāryā* sings the praises of *Ambālī*'s sacred feet. But he does not reveal it all of a sudden at the beginning itself and keeps us in suspense.

Thvadhanyah pāṇibhyām abhayavaradhō dhaivathagānah
Thvamēkā naivāsi prakatitha-varabhithyabhinayā
Bhayāth-thrāthum dhātum phalamapi cha vāṇchāsamadhikam
Śaraṇyē lōkānām thava hi charaṇāvēva nipuṇau.

'All deities other than you have the mudras of abhaya and varada. That is, they are seen with hand gestures that signify the banishment of fear and the granting of boons. You alone do not enact through your hand gestures to suggest that you grant boons to your devotees or banish their fear.' This is what the first half of the stanza means.

'What!,' one might exclaim, 'why does the *Āchāryā* speak like this? Does it mean that *Ambālī* does not free us from fear? Is she not installed as *Abhayāmbikā* at *Māyāvaram*?'

It is not the *Āchāryā*'s view that *Ambālī* does not grant boons or that she does not free us from fear. All he says is that, unlike other deities, she does not do so with her hand gestures.

'What does this mean?'

It means *Ambālī* grants us boons and frees us from fear with her feet. This is what the *Āchāryā* mentions in the second half of the stanza. '*Thava hi charaṇau ēva nipuṇau*': 'your feet themselves are capable of doing the same', granting us boons and freeing us from fear. They are 'specialists in the same.'

What the celestial trees do with their branches (which are their hands) *Ambāl* does with her feet. I have already spoken about this idea which occurs in a later stanza. Here the *Āchāryā* says: 'Your feet have the special ability to protect your devotees from fear (*'bhayāth thrāthum'*) and to shower on them boons far more than what they ask for (*'phalamapicha vānchā samadhikam dhāthum'*).'

What one does with one's hand entails mental and physical effort. Work itself is called 'kārya' and the word is derived from 'kara' meaning - 'hand'. Deities other than *Ambāl* have to use their hands (make hand gestures) and strain themselves in granting boons to their devotees, in freeing them from fear. 'But you are all-powerful. You accomplish everything with ease and all that is needed is your mental resolve.' *Ambāl* performs the five functions (Panchakruthya) like creation, sustenance and so on by flickering her eyebrows for a moment. The *Āchāryā* states this later (Stanza 24): '*Kshanachalithayōh bhrūlathikayōh*', by knitting for a brief moment her eyebrows that are like creepers. A deity like her does not have to make any effort with her hands to give boons to her devotees or to free them from fear. Her very presence is enough. What is her form like?

'*Lōkānām saraṇyē*.' says the *Āchāryā*. She is the refuge of all the worlds. So all people fall at her charaṇās (*feet*), chanting '*charaṇām*' ('we come to you for refuge'). While she, as her natural self, is the refuge of all, her feet grant boons and ward off the fear of all those who go to her seeking her protection. She does not have to make any effort for this. She is like a flower spreading its fragrance.

When you pray to a deity for freedom from fear you will receive just that boon (freedom from fear) and nothing more. But if you ask for this or that you may receive more than what you ask for. The feet of *Ambāl* are such-they give you more than what you ask the goddess for '*vānchāsasmadhikam*.'

One question may arise here. 'Why cannot *Ambāl* give her devotee abhaya (freedom from fear) as one among the many boons she grants? You ask for this and that and if you ask the Lord for abhaya he will grant that boon too. So why should abhaya be separated from other boons and why should you specially pray for it?

Abhaya is not a commodity belonging to the give-and-take business. It is indeed another name for Adhvaitha. The Upanishads themselves say: 'There is fear only when there are two (dvaitam).' When there is only one what else is there of which you have to be afraid? Only when there is a second entity do you have reason of any fear being caused by it. 'If a man thinks that there is even the slightest difference between him and the Brahman he will be afraid of it,' so says the *Thaithiriyva upanishad*. When we think of the Brahman as being separate from us, that is as the *Sagurā* Brahman, ours is an attitude of devotion mixed with fear for it. Europeans speak of a man's 'God-fearing' nature as among his high qualities. When does such a fear cease to exist? When we have the Adhvaithic realisation that we do not exist as a *jīvathmā* (individual Self) separate from *Īśvarā*. When there is One Object, without a second, there cannot be two separate entities, one who grants boons and the other who receives them. The hand gesture called abhaya just serves the purpose of a mark for a deity but in truth abhaya is an abstract concept. It is a mark of the state of the Supreme Truth, a state in which there cannot exist the business of giving boons and of receiving them. The Lord frees us from all fear, the fear of being born again, the fear of death, the fear of being dualistically separated; but abhaya is the realisation of Adhvaitha. That is why it is not included among the boons and treated separately.

Why then should Vara and abhaya (the granting of boons and of freedom from fear) be divided into two separate categories? In other systems (that are dualistic) the banishment of '*bhavabhīti*'

or the fear of being born again and again is considered the highest of the Lord's blessings and in keeping with its importance abhaya is mentioned separately. These systems do not go beyond such an explanation.

In the abhaya gesture of a deity, the right hand will point upward. They (those belonging to dualistic systems) would say that it points to the upper realms of *Vaikuntha* or *Kailāsā*. We (Adhvaitis) would say that it points to the state of Advaita which is absolute and undivided like space.

In the vara hasta (the hand gesture denoting the granting of boons) the hand will point downward. To say 'I want this, "I want that"' bespeaks an attitude that betrays that the devotee belongs to a lower plane. That is why the boon mudra is like that. Giving anything with the left hand is usually regarded as not dignified. But it can also be taken in a good sense. After all, *Ambāl* herself belongs to the left. The hand that signifies abhaya is quiescent or functionless and belongs to the side of *Śiva* who is all quietude. So the vara hasta that blesses belongs appropriately to the left where *Śakthi* is. To what does this hand point? To *Ambāl*'s lotus feet. 'I give you my feet. Hold them. That is the great boon.' We can thus interpret the boon mudra in this high sense also.

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DEITY OF THE HYMN HINTED AT

The *Āchāryā* observes in this stanza (4) that hand gestures are associated with deities other than *Ambāl*. He says: 'You do not make the hand gestures denoting the grant of boons (vara) and of freedom from fear. You are the only one who does not grant boons and freedom from fear by making hand gestures.'

He says so having in mind *Ambāl* in her form of *Lalithā* Thripurasundari who is, after all, the subject of this hymn.

Since it is said that if *Śiva* is activated it is because of her, it follows that she is the source of the power of all deities. That being the case, if they grant boon and abhaya their power for doing so is also derived from her. Would it not then mean that she is the highest of those granting boon and abhaya? What other deities do with their hands she does with ease with her feet. But *Ambāl* in her form of *Bhuvanēśvari* does have the hand gestures of boon and abhaya. Even Thripurasundari in her form of the Child Amba (she is *Bālā*, *Ambāl* as daughter), has hands with the boon and abhaya mudras.

‘Thvadanyah pāṇibhyām abhayavaradhō dhaivathagaṇah’ : ‘the groups of deities other than you have mudras of boon and abhaya.’ We should not take the *Āchāryā* literally here, that all deities other than *Ambāl* have hand gestures of boon and abhaya. In any direction we turn, in every nook and corner, we see *Vignēśvara*. Does he have these hand gestures? No. What about Nataraja? He has the abhaya hand but not the boon. We see in many temples that the icon of *Vishṇu-Durgā* has only the abhaya hand. *Mīnākshi* does not have either. As for *Mahā Vishṇu* he has hands holding the conchshell, the discus, the mace and the lotus, but he has no boon and abhaya hands.

Varadarājā in *Kāñchīpuram* has only the abhaya hand but no vara hand, even though he is *Varadarājā*. With the hand that is usually associated with the granting of boons he holds the mace. Everywhere, *Mahālakshmi* is seen with both the vara and abhaya hand gestures. *Sarasvathi* has neither.

In the case of *Durgā* and some idols of *Subrahmaṇya* the abhaya hand is on the right side and the left hand directly opposite rests on the thigh - this is known as the ‘*ūruhasta*’ (hand on the thigh). In the case of *Venkataramaṇa* the right side has the vara hand and the left hand directly against it is placed on the thigh (*ūruhasta*).

Lalithā-Thripurasundari has neither a hand with vara mudra nor an abhaya hand. Instead she has the bow of sugarcane and the arrows of flowers. In a later stanza, however, the *Āchāryā* expresses the view that all the four hands of the goddess grant abhaya. In the beginning Brahma, like *Śiva*, had five heads. But because of an offence committed by him *Śiva* plucked off one of them. The *Āchāryā* says in the stanza referred to above that Brahma adored the four hands of *Ambālī* in the belief that the remaining four heads of his would not be endangered and that each of them would receive the abhaya of one of her hands. It seems that when *Ambālī*, instead of her husband, grants abhaya she would be committing an improper act- an offence-if she did it with her feet. So it was that she granted freedom from fear to Brahma with her hands.

So, but for her form of Thripurasundari, *Ambālī* has the vara and abhaya hands. Apart from her, a number of other deities also do not have these hand gestures. But because of poetic licence and in order to heighten the glory of the subject of the hymn, that is *Ambālī*, the *Āchāryā* states with a bit of exaggeration: 'All deities other than you have the vara and abhaya hands. You alone do not show yourself to be possessing them.'

He describes the mudras, the hand gestures, as 'abhinaya', acting 'varābhītyabhinayā'. The mudras mentioned for action in the *Nātyasāsthra* are the same as those mentioned in the mantra *Śāsthra*. 'Abhinaya' is giving outward expression to one's inner feelings and emotions through movements of one's face, hands and legs. Of them, the feelings or ideas conveyed through the hands, particularly with the fingers, are called mudras.

In the first three stanzas it is not clearly stated which of the many aspects of *Ambālī* or forms is the subject of the hymn. From the title too we cannot make out what it is-or who it is -- and we have two titles, '*Ānandalahari*' for the first section and

'*Saundaryalaharī*' for the second. It is only in the fourth stanza that the *Āchāryā* gives a little clue by stating that she [*Ambāl* or her form that is the theme of the hymn] has neither a vara nor an abhaya hand. He speaks about what she does not possess, but not what she does possess. He does not, for instance, mention the number of hands she has nor the objects held by them. So there is much room for conjecture about who she is. In the next two stanzas also the *Āchāryā* does not reveal the secret but he gives some more clues as to who she is. It is only in a subsequent stanza, in the seventh, that he describes the characteristics of the deity, the subject of his hymn, in the manner of a *dhyāna-sloka*, mentioning at the same time that she is the presiding deity of the *Śrīvidhyā thanthra*, that is *Lalithāmbikā*, or Thripurasundari. But even here he does not mention the name. Throughout the hymn he does not mention it anywhere. The *Āchāryā* has followed the poetic technique in this. He does not disclose the name of the deity (the subject of his hymn) at the very start and excites the reader's interest by revealing it little by little by offering clues, and finally loosening up and emptying it all, so to speak.

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CAN KĀMA EVER BE A BLESSING?

In the next stanza, that is the fifth, the *Āchāryā* says that it was by performing puja to *Ambāl* that *Mahā Vishṇu* was able to assume the divinely alluring form of *Mohini* that stirred so firm a mind as that of *Śiva* and created in him love for that form. During the churning of the ocean for amrutha (ambrosia), *Vishṇu* took the form of *Mohini* and by enchanting the asuras by her beauty and by clever talk denied them their share of the ambrosia and distributed it among the celestials. You must be familiar with this story. *Paramēśvarā* was smitten with love for *Mohini* and married her. The child born of their union is *Ayyappa-Śāsthā*, also called Hariharaputra, after his parents. In his *Śiva-pādhādhi-keśāntha-*

sthothra, the *Āchāryā* extols Vignēśvara, Subrahmaṇya and *Śāsthā*. It is in the land where Malayalam is spoken and where the *Āchāryā* was born that *Ayyappa-Śāsthā* is more famous than anywhere else.

In the context of the arousal of the desire in the Brahman to conduct the affairs of the world, did I not say that the Brahman and the *Brahmasakthi* were spoken of in erotic terms as the *Kāmēśvara-Kāmēśvarī* pair? It was by worshipping *Ambāl* that *Mahā Viṣṇu*, as *Mohini*, was able to involve *Paramēśvarā* in love. This idea occurring here gives us a clue to the fact that *Kāmēśvarī* is the subject of the hymn. It is also supported by the statement in the previous stanza that the deity of the hymn does not have the *hastha-mudras* denoting the hands that grant boons and freedom from fear.

The second half of the stanza confirms our guess about the deity hymned. It says: 'By prostrating himself before you and obtaining your grace did Manmatha acquire the form that Rathi 'lapped up' with her eyes, a form that was visible only to her. And then even those, including the sages, who had conquered their senses, were possessed by Manmatha and so were inspired by love.'

Manmatha who had been reduced to ashes by *Īśvarā* was restored to life and to his old position by *Kāmēśvarī*. This supports our conjecture that *Kāmēśvarī* is the subject of the hymn.

How can *Ambāl* be extolled as the one who imparted the power to Manmatha to drag *Īśvarā* into *kāma*, *Īśvara* who is the embodiment of *jñāna* and the object of our adoration? Again how can she be praised, she who gave strength to Manmatha to enchant even the sages and inspire their minds with desire? 'It is a hymn of a high order and it is by the *Āchāryā*. How can we find fault with it in this manner?' Such a question does arise even though we are reluctant to ask it. *Jñāna* arises when the illusory world ceases to

exist for us. But here, in this hymn, the creation of the world is attributed to *Ambāl*. There is *jnāna* only when there is no *kāma*. But here *Ambāl* is adored as the one who strengthens *kāma*. Can it be so? If it is, we are gnawed by doubts as to whether *kāma* itself is a blessing.

There must be forces opposed to one another which clash with one another. The good forces must fight with the bad ones and win and hoist the flag of victory. Only then can they take pride in themselves. That also creates an interest in life. If there is no opposition to the good forces and if things go smoothly for them they may not even become known to the world. Also it will all be a bore. You will know the comfort of shade only after you have been in the sun.

The tussle between opposing forces is to show that ultimately good will be victorious. It is to demonstrate this truth that the still and quiescent *Parabrahmam* is said to have the urge of *Kāma* and is associated with the cosmos. It is because of the *kāma* of the Brahman that the universe came into being. Then the sentient cosmos grew with each sentient creature becoming subject to *kāma*.

A strange thing about the opposing forces of good and evil is that the good forces have evil elements in them and the evil forces have good elements in them. We must have an understanding of this subtle truth in our struggle so as to fully appreciate the cosmic drama and its various moods. That desire and anger are bad is a statement based on a generalisation. If you go deep into the subject you will recognise that they too have good aspects. You must have desire for the good, for good subjects. Bad objects must arouse anger in you. In such a sense desire and anger are not evils. They may even be necessary at times. Even in what appears to be good or virtuous bad elements may lie hidden.

There are two things to be considered above everything else: the Lord bestowing his compassion on us is one: the second is our going to him for refuge, our surrendering to him. These two are possible only when there is creation and when there are bad elements which it is necessary for us to combat. The highest as far as the Lord is concerned is bestowing his compassion on us; and the highest on our side is to surrender to him. The best we can do is not to do anything, realising that we are incapable of doing anything.

If there was no creation or if there was creation and yet people were not troubled by desire, anger and so on, where would be the occasion for *Ambāl* to show her compassion? If there was no trouble for anybody and everybody was satisfied with his or her lot, who would care for *Ambāl*'s compassion? When we fight the forces that oppose us as best we can and eventually realise that we are not strong enough to triumph over them, only then will we think of *Ambāl* and go to her for refuge, crying, 'You alone are our help.' And only then will we experience the great joy of surrender- and only then will *Ambāl* come rushing to protect us and only then will there be full scope for her to show her compassion and take delight in the same. When *Ambāl*'s protection becomes an accomplished fact, the compassion of 'that side' [that is of *Ambāl*] and the surrender of 'this side' (that is our going to her for refuge) will be dissolved in the confluence of the flows of joy experienced by both sides. Any kind of inquiry now into whether it was the victory of *Ambāl* or of us [the individual Self] has no meaning: the individual Self becomes she, that is becomes *Ambāl*.

It would be all right even if a hundred thousand or ten million people were spoiled and their lives rendered futile. It would be enough if one in ten million became successful in the fight against evil forces and went beyond creation. Is it necessary for all the seeds borne by a tree to become trees? Do the millions of sperms

produced by a man become fertilised and become his offspring? Similarly, it would be enough if one in ten million people attained fullness. In that, *Ambāl* thinks, the purpose of creation will be fulfilled.

Even all those who have been spoiled and become futile will not remain so for all time. Our religion does not subscribe to the doctrine of eternal damnation. *Madhvāchāryā* gave expression to such a view. We may take it that he hoped that at least by instilling fear in the minds of people they would be turned to good. It is our general belief that there is liberation even for a great sinner. Even if it takes aeons and aeons, *Ambāl* will correct her children who have been spoiled and hold them in her lap.

A King was away from his capital to wage a war. On the scene of battle he saw one of his ordinary subjects and asked him to see him in his camp. 'I will be denied entry into your camp,' the man said. 'You must give me your signet ring or something similar.' The King gave him a ring but on examination it was found to be the enemy king's signet ring. The man was puzzled. The king laughed and explained to him why he had given him such a ring. 'Many people have taken my signet ring for this and that purpose. Already there is a long queue of such men. If you join this queue it will take long before your turn comes and by then the purpose for which I want you will have lost its urgency. That is why I gave you the enemy king's signet ring. We have confiscated such rings from his spies and what I have given you is one of them. Keep it hidden and pretend to come stealthily to me, making sure that you will be seen by my bodyguard. They will take you captive, inspect your person and, seeing the enemy king's signet ring, bring you to me before it is the turn of all others.

What *Ambāl* does is similar. Desire and anger are like the enemy king's signet ring that takes us to her. *Krishṇa Paramātmā* asked Kunthi her wish. 'I want suffering. Grant me that. Then

alone will I think of you, she said. How is suffering caused? By desire, anger and so on. Only when we are tormented by them, when we suffer their consequences do we think of the Lord and pray to him. We will then realise how the creation of this world, *kāma* and *krōdha* (anger) are all blessings.

If *Ambāl* bestows *kāma* on an individual it is because she will have an opportunity to show her compassion. But this does not stop with that individual. It is an 'arrangement' by which the children born of his *kāma* will also receive her compassion. It is because of her compassion that they (the children) are born [they get their janma]. One more point to be added to what has been said here and which is contrary to our beliefs concerning desire and anger: Great men have sung, they have indeed cried loudly as if in despair, 'No more birth.' But here it is stated that the fact that many are born because of the *kāma* of one entity is a blessing. How can that be?

It is all right to cry, 'No more birth.' But can people who have bundles and bundles of karma still to be exhausted escape by crying like that? To work out their remaining karma they have to be born again and again and live virtuously. If there is no *kāma* how can people be born again so as to unload their burden of karma? During the time an opportunity is given them by rebirth and if they do not wash away their past karma and not add further to the impurity of their karma, it will be their own fault. Birth is an opportunity given us to bring an end to further birth. We must understand this truth and act accordingly.

It is out of her compassion that *Ambāl* created *kāma* and appointed Manmatha as its authority: she did so because people should have an opportunity to exert themselves so as to be freed from birth. She established a system in which *kāma* is one of the aims of a man's life along with dharma, artha and mōksha. *Kāma* is to be experienced in the householder's stage of life and in a

disciplines and restrained manner, according to the tenets of the *Śāsthrās*. If life is lived in this manner, in due time you 'will be freed from *kāma*, become purified, and taken to the higher stage of *sanyasa*.

There are exceptions to all rules governing matters in creation. In keeping with this *Ambāl* has created a few individuals—a very few individuals—who observe strict brahmacharya from childhood and remain *sanyāsis* till the very end of their lives.

'These explanations are all right. But why should *Īśvarā* who is the personification of *jñāna* have been disturbed by *kāma*? Why should the minds of seers-seers who have conquered their senses—be similarly disturbed? And why should *Ambāl* be adored for doing the same?

That they were agitated by *kāma* is not the end of the story. The fact is they became pure again. If they were at one time subject to *kāma* it was for the well-being of the world. Thus Hariharaputra 'was born to slay a demon who had received a boon according to which only such a son (of *Śiva* and *Vishṇu*) could slay him. If *Viśvāmitra* had not been enchanted by *Mēnaka* there would have been no *Śakuntala* and the play *Śakuntalam*. If *Vyāsa* had not been attracted by *Kruthāsi* there would have been no *Śukāchāryā* who was unmatched for his observance of *Brahmāchāryā*.

These accounts remind us that without the help, without the grace, of *Parāśakthi*, anyone, whoever he be, will stumble and fall. We should not think that we can achieve things on our own and we must remain humble always, seeking her grace.

We must also consider this : whoever has the power and authority to create something, he alone has the power and authority to destroy it. If the government alone has the power to make laws it means it alone has the authority to rescind them. Can we, on our own, change the laws of the government? If *Ambāl* has

the authority to create this world as well as *kāma*, she alone can free us from this world-and she alone can give us a helping hand to become freed from *kāma*. There is another side to the fact that she appointed *Kāma* (Manmatha) an authority and brought even seers under his spell. A coin has an obverse side and a reverse side. That *Ambāl* brought seers under the spell of Manmatha may be taken as the obverse side of the coin. The reverse side of it is that of her bidding Manmatha to keep away from certain individuals and keeping them untainted. Manmatha is an authority so far as we are concerned; he is a servant of hers. We cannot triumph over *kāma* on our own. It has to happen by *her* 'issuing orders' to that effect. She who sets Manmatha on us, she alone has the authority to keep him away from us. The present stanza speaks only of *Ambāl* urging Manmatha to bring us under his spell. We must understand that there is a reverse side to this, that she will grant us the grace of destroying *Kāma*.

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THE POWER OF AMBĀL' S SIDELONG GLANCE IT MADE KĀMA A TRIUMPHANT HERO

The next stanza (6) is entirely devoted to Manmatha. The dualistic world emerging from non-dualism as a result of *kāma* or desire and then the same dualistic world being made non-dualistic through the compassion of *Ambāl* has a central place in her sport. *Kāma* (Manmatha), who is the personification of desire, has great importance here. *Ambāl* herself has divine names like *Kāmesvari* and *Kāmākshi*.

Dhanuh paushpam maurvī madhukaramayī Panchavisikhāh
Vasanttah sāmānthō malayamarudāyōdhana-rathah
Thathāpyekah sarvam himagirisuthē kāmapi-krupām
Apāngāththē labdhvā jagadhidhamanangō vijayathe

‘With weapons by no means strong Manmatha triumphs over all the world. What is it that gives him such power? It is *Ambāl*’s sidelong glance, ‘ this is the import of the stanza.

What are Manmatha’s weapons or tools? The first is ‘dhanuh paushpam’, a bow made of flowers.

Why does Manmatha go to war? He wants to conquer all creatures of the world, that is he wants to subject them to *kāma* or desire. He sets out on his chariot, bearing in his hands his bow and arrows and taking with him his companions and assistants. We are amused to note what his bow and chariot are like.

The first, the bow is made of flowers;

That Manmatha’s bow is the sugarcane is common knowledge. If all [warriors] have iron bows, he has a sugarcane bow. If it is bent it will break. But, according to the *Āchāryā*, Manmatha has even a more fragile bow, one made of flowers. Though not as strong as one made of iron, a sugarcane bow has some weight. If you hit a man on his head with it, it will hurt.

‘Was it right on the part of the *Āchāryā* to have changed Manmatha’s bow, make it one of flowers instead of sugarcane? For any deity his weapons are like his eyes, nose and so on, part and parcel of his makeup. When we perform *pūjā* or *hōma* to a deity it is on the basis of his/ her physical parts and the weapons possessed by him/her. Then why has the *Āchāryā* changed the weapon of Manmatha? Could it be that the true form of ‘paushpam’ is ‘paundram’? The bow of *Kāma* and *Kāmākshī* is the sugarcane called ‘pundra ikshu’. In the *Śyāmalādankam Ambāl* is addressed as ‘*Pundrekshu-pāsānkuṣa-pushpabāñahasthe*’. I was wondering whether ‘*pundrekshu*’ was taken to be ‘paundram’ and whether ‘*paushpam*’ was wrongly derived from it. Then I reminded myself how it was in the *Amarakōsam*. I discovered that ‘paushpam’ was right, that the *Āchāryā* had not changed the bow of Manmatha: to

think so would be sacrilegious. I had also thought of the possibility of the *Āchāryā* having correctly used the word 'paundram' and of someone else wrongly inscribing it on the palm-leaf. I was wrong in thinking thus. Among the many names of Manmatha mentioned in the *Amarakosam* we have the following: '*pushpadhanva Rathipathir Makaradhvaja Ātmabhūh.*' '*Pushpadhanva*' is the same as the word used by the *Āchāryā*, '*dhanuh paushpam.*' There is no mention of sugarcane (of Manmatha having a bow of sugarcane) at all.

Subrahmaṇya, it is said, has two peacocks (as his vehicles). He had a peacock as his mount from his childhood itself. Later he slew the demon *Sūrapadma* and made him a peacock which became another vehicle of his. Thus he has two peacocks. In some temples the head of the peacock is to his left and the plumage is to his right. It is the peacock that was originally *Sūrapadma*. But in most temples of *Subrahmaṇya* the head of the peacock is to his right and the plumage to his left. And that is the divine peacock he has had from the very beginning. Similarly, it occurs to me that Manmatha has two bows, one of flowers and another of sugarcane.

Manmatha's arrows are also flowers. In the *Amarakōsam* we find that one of his names is '*Kusumēshu*', '*Kusumam*' = flower; '*ishu*' = arrow; so '*Kusumēshu*' means one who has arrow(s) of flowers. In the present stanza we have the term '*Pāṇcha visikhā*', meaning five arrows. The number of arrows is mentioned but not what they are. Usually warriors keep a large number of arrows in their quiver. But Manmatha has just five, and they are delicate flowers. The five flowers: *aravinda*, *asoka*, *chūtha navamallika* and *nīlōtpala*, according to the *Amarakōsam*. '*Pāṇchasāra*', one with five arrows, is one of the names of Manmatha mentioned in that lexicon.

The bow of flowers is not hard and there are just five arrows. We usually speak of certain objects piercing us like an arrow. But

these arrows of Manmatha are the opposite in nature. Instead of piercing us, any one of these arrows is such that the moment you see it you would like to rub the most delicate part of your body, your eye, with it. The string of the bow is made of honey-bees. These may seem to cause some fear. The pain will be unbearable if they happen to sting us. But, then, they are not meant to sting the 'target' of Manmatha. If they go seeking the target how will Manmatha be able to discharge his arrows? How do you then account for their presence? The answer is they enjoy the fragrance of the bow of flowers and the flower arrows and keep humming in joy.

Now the sugarcane bow. Sugarcane is the source of sugar or jaggery, the source of the sweetness of everything. In the present stanza what is mentioned is the flower-bow. But the sugarcane-bow comes naturally to mind. And does not *Ambāl* bear in her hand the sugarcane bow? Since *Kāma* and *Kāmēśvarī* have the same, to speak of *Kāma* having the sugarcane bow may not be wrong. Like sweetness among tastes so is love among feelings. We liken hatred, the opposite of love, to sharpness of taste. When we say that so-and-so speaks sharply or pungently, don't we mean he speaks with hate? So if we wish to battle with someone and vanquish him the right thing to carry would be a weapon of chillies. As for Manmatha, he carries the opposite, the weapon of sugarcane.

Sugarcane is the sweetest thing in the world, and the softest are flowers. The bark of a tree is rough. If we happen to rub ourselves against it we will bleed. Some trees have thorns sticking out of their bark or stems. The leaves may be tender and soft but they are often uncomfortably sticky and as the days pass they lose their smoothness and become harsh to the touch. Take any fruit. When it is tender it will be rough; both the unripe (the stage after it is tender and ripe fruit will be smooth to the touch, but the sap oozing from the stalk will be sticky. Flowers are the purest of

things, the lightest, the softest and the most beautiful. However wild or brutish a man may be, his eyes are delicate and even a speck of dust can make them red. Similarly, a tree like the banyan may be gnarled and knotty and adamant but how delicate are its flowers, how soft. Is it not remarkable that Manmatha has five such flowers for his arrows? Aravinda, asoka, chutha, navamallika and nilotpala – each of these stands for a particular sense organ. In the Lalitha *Sahasranāmam* the five arrows borne by *Āmbāl* are also associated with the five senses. They are called the ‘*Pāñchatanmātra-sāyakā*’: the five *tanmātrās* are the five subtle bhūthas perceived by the five senses, the five *bhūtās* being sabda (sound), *sparsa* (touch), *rūpa* (form), taste (*rasa*) and *gandha* (smell).

If the five arrows are to be aimed at the five senses, what is the bow from which they are to be discharged? It is the mind which is the support of the five senses. The *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam* has this name for *Ambāl* ‘*Manōrupekshu-kōdanda*’ (the one with the bow of sugarcane symbolising the mind). The name ‘*Panchathanmathra-sāyakā*’ comes later.

Each flower symbolises a sense. Not only that, each is associated with one of the five *thanmāthrās*. Where there is a flower there is a bee also. I think that the bee provides one of the *thanmāthrās* that the flower does not have. The flower is soft to the touch is beautiful to behold (has a beautiful form), has the taste or *rasa* of nectar and has a pleasant smell. But it does not have the beauty of sound. And this lack is filled by the humming of the bee that comes in search of its nectar. Manmatha does not go to battle with the cry of ‘Kill’ but with the music of the bees humming, the bees that make up the string of his bow.

Thus the bow, its string and arrows are not what ought to be, that is there is nothing warlike about them in strength or harshness. There are weak Kings, who have strong vassals paying

them tribute and on the strength of the latter they keep winning laurels of victory. What about the king that is *Kāma*? Has he any strong and tough assistants to help him? No, there is none.

'Vasantah sāmāntah'

The vassal of Manmatha, his assistant and companion, is Vasanta Or Spring. It is said that the season of spring personified, Vasanta, comes as the companion of Manmatha to serve him by inflaming the passion of people. He is the embodiment of the time when it is extremely pleasant, when the sun is gentle and it is neither hot nor cold. On his advent the trees, shorn of their leaves, will acquire a raiment of green and give shade to people. And there will be a riot of flowers. The season of spring is also called '*pushpa-samāyām*' (the time of flowers). The sun is not harsh now and the cold is not biting, and it is a feast for the eyes and the nose. Is it not amusing that the one who personifies such a season should be a companion to the belligerent *Kāma*? It is customary for a combatant in a war to discharge the *āgnēyāstra* or the *stambhanastra*. Here, however, the companion of our warrior is one who creates salubrious weather.

When we come to consider the chariot on which Manmatha rides we will have more reason to be amused.

'Malayamarudāyōdhana-rathah'

'Ayodhana' = for the purpose of war; 'rathah' = chariot; 'malayamarut' = the wind blowing from the mountain called Malaya: it means the cool wind redolent of the scent of sandalwood. Instead of spreading poison gas this enemy spreads the extremely pleasant and cool wind by making it his chariot. Since it is described as 'mandam' it means it is not a strong wind.

Manmatha's weapons, his bow and arrows, are at least seen by the eyes. But his companion Vasanta and his chariot of wind are not visible. We know that spring is here when the trees that are

bare burgeon and the mango blossoms and jasmines spread their fragrance. It is only by feeling the pleasant wind blowing on us that we recognise the arrival of the Marut chariot. Here we have an enemy vehicle like this, not the usual tank that comes rumbling along and crushes us tinder. Strangest of all is the warrior himself, Manmatha. What is he like? 'Anangah. He is Ananga. He has many names like Madana, Manmatha, *Māra*, Kandarpa and *Kāma*. But it is very meaningfully that the *Āchāryā* has chosen the name of Ananga here.

What does the name mean? Ananga = An + anga, one without any limbs, incorporeal. It means Manmatha has no body or form. After he had been reduced to ashes by *Paramēśvarā*, *Ambāl* restored him to life but without his body. She did not want to undo totally what her husband had done. It is for this reason that, though she restored him to life, she did not restore him to his body or form. But, out of compassion for his wife Rathi, *Ambāl* blessed her that she would be able to see his physical form - that is she alone. For all the rest she made him a force like light, sound and wind.

A warrior would be well-nourished, big-built, with sinewy arms and legs. He would be fearful to look at as he twirls his moustaches. In our story the warrior is different. Leave alone his being not strong like one whose hands reaches down to the knees, Manmatha cannot be shown even as a gaunt and thin figure; he is formless.

Though Vasanta (Spring) has no visible form, you can know him from nature, from its luxuriance and guess what he is like. Even the chariot of Malayamaruta you may know from the wind blowing on you. But the one who has all these angas, the 'angi' who is the root of it all, you cannot guess what he is like in any way. He cannot be known and yet he remains a very subtle force penetrating each and all and holding sway over them. How strange!

One who has no body triumphs over all the world with instruments ridiculously weak.

During the slaying of Thripura, *Paramēśvarā* had a tremendously strong bow in the Meru mountain and its string was the serpent *Vāsuki* and the arrow was *Mahā Vishṇu* himself. The sun and the moon were the wheels of his chariot, the earth was its floor and the charioteer was Brahma. But he did not use any of them to destroy the Thripura demons. He just laughed. That was all. There was no flailing of hands or legs by *Śiva*, no wrestling with his foes, no flexing of muscles. *Paramēśvarā* just laughed. He laughed thinking to himself: 'I have *Parāśakthi* in me, but they have come [that is *Mahā Vishṇu*, Brahma and the rest thinking I would need their help.]' The moment he laughed the Thripura demons were reduced to ashes.

Although *Paramēśvarā* had powerful instruments or weapons, he won without using any of them. Manmatha wins his war, with weapons that are not strong in the least. The reason is the same for both. It is *Ambāl* [who is behind their victory]. She brought the Lord success by residing in him as *Parāśakthi*. And Here she has made Manmatha victorious all over the world by casting on him her sidelong glance for a fleeting moment, and thus blessing him.

The weapons at the disposal of Manmatha are utterly weak and he himself has no body. Even so he triumphs over all the world all by himself. He has neither an army nor any cavalry or elephants and Vasanta is his companion only for name's sake. His success is due to 'a little bit of your compassion which we cannot describe (*kāmapī krupām*),' so the *Āchāryā* says addressing *Ambāl*. He calls her 'Himagirisuthe'. How does Manmatha receive her compassion? The *Āchāryā* says, addressing *Ambāl* again, 'The *apangāth labdhvā*' ('*apāngāthe*' in the *śloka*). That is 'with your sidelong glance'. With a little bit of *Ambāl*'s compassion, though

with weak weapons, Manmatha triumphs over the world all by himself, 'jagadhidām sarvam vijayathē'.

To bestow blessings in this manner on everything in creation is the function of *Māyā* belonging to saprapancha. For this the sidelong glance of *Ambāl* for a fleeting moment is enough. The destruction of Thripura means the rejection of the subtle, gross and *Karaṇa* bodies and remaining the maha-*Karaṇa* of the Brahman. This is what unites one with the nishprapancha.

And it is possible only when *Ambāl* inheres in one fully. If the one who burned Thripura also burned *Kāma* it was because the little grace the latter had obtained from *Ambāl* could not stand against the power of the full grace *Śiva* had obtained from her.

To speak of the victory of *Kāma*, of *Ambāl* making him victorious, should not be the end of the story for us. It is necessary that we triumph over *Kāma* ourselves. We must remind ourselves that when *Īśvarā* triumphed over *Kāma* (i.e. when he destroyed him), *Ambāl* was present in him to lend him the necessary strength. Now we need her blessings. The power that creates: it alone can destroy. Here the *Āchāryā* speaks of the power that creates.

It is with a high purpose that *Ambāl* has given Manmatha weapons that have no strength. When he obtains victory with them it is that he will be humble enough to realise that he owes his success to her charity to her kindness. It is for the reason that he should not become vain that out of her compassion, she gave him such objects of little strength as were his weapons.

Ananga, one without limbs, one without a body, once possessed a body that was beautiful in all respects. It is as a reference to the fact the he once possessed a body of unsurpassed beauty that we still liken good-looking people to Manmatha. He was then vain about his looks and it was a time when the celestials

were going through much suffering at the hands of *Sūrapadma*. The demon could be killed only by a son born to *Īśvarā*, but the god, in his form of *Dakṣhīnāmūrti*, was then engaged in austerities. Manmatha was sent by the celestials to him so to inspire love in him for *Ambāl* who had descended to earth as the daughter of the king of mountains (*Himavān* or Himalaya). Among the various incarnations of *Ambāl*, it was now that she appeared as *Pārvathī* daughter of *Himavān*, and it was now that *Īśvarā* burnt Manmatha. But later, having a change of mind, he was moved by love for *Pārvathī* and married her. So there is aptness in the use of the word '*Himagirisuthā*'. That story comes later.

To start with the celestials sent Manmatha so as to inspire feeling of love spring in the Lord's heart for *Pārvathī*. Then Manmatha became vain about the fact that he could churn the mind of *Paramēśvarā* himself and thus achieve a great victory. 'Manmatha means one who churns the mind, 'Mathanam' means churning. Don't we speak '*kṣhīrāb̐dhi mathanam*' (the churning of the ocean of milk)? Manmatha set out on his errand-the task entrusted to him by the celestials-and in his arrogance he thought that he could churn the mind of the Lord who was like a mountain of dispassion. But what happened to him? He was burnt beyond recognition. Later *Ambāl* gave him new life and he was now no longer boastful that he could do anything. Then he triumphed over the Lord also but this is part of the '*Kāmākṣhī Purāṇa*', not '*Manmatha Purāṇa*'. From this you must realise that Manmatha's success was entirely due to the strength given him by *Kāmākṣhī*, that is *Ambāl*. According to the purāṇa, Manmatha's recognised the truth of it in all his humility. He approached the Lord now, not with the feeling, 'I am going to win on my own strength', but with the thought that 'the power of my Mother's blessings will bring me success'. In this spirit did he approach the Lord and achieve victory. When he had been reduced to ashes by the fire of *Śiva's* eye, his pride in his own power had also been destroyed at the

same time. It is because *Ambāl* thought he should no longer nurse any pride in the beauty of his body that she restored him to life but did not restore him to his body.

‘For the powerful even a blade of grass can be a weapon, so goes a proverb. Darbha is a kind of grass. To kill *Kākāśura*, Rama used a blade of darbha for arrow. And the demon, unable to face it, fell at his feet. And Rama forgave him. Here Rama demonstrated the truth of the statement, ‘For the powerful even a blade of grass is a weapon.’ Rama was powerful in many ways including in the use of manthras. It was with the potency of manthras that he made a weapon out of a blade of darbha grass. With the power imparted by the sidelong glance of *Parāśakthi* even a flower becomes a weapon in the hands of Manmatha.

It was with such a sidelong glance of hers that *Ambāl* restored Manmatha to life after he had been reduced to ashes. Her husband *Śiva* had destroyed him with his eye of fire and to restore him to life she glanced at these ashes with her ambrosial eye. And at once Manmatha got his life back. One meaning of ‘*Kāmākshi*’ is ‘she who created *Kāma* with her sidelong glance’.

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KĀMA’S CONQUEST OF ŚIVA NOT MENTIONED

That it was *Lalithāmbāl* in her form of *Kāmēśvari* who gave power and ‘status’ to *Kāma* is indicated to some extent clearly in the sixth though not openly slated. That *Kāma* triumphs over the world is mentioned- ‘*jagadhidam /Anangō vijayathē*’ but that he triumphed over *Īśvara* is not revealed. The chief sport of *Kāmēśvari* in this story had the purpose of enabling him to accomplish that great victory. The use of the term ‘*Himagirisuthe*’ shows that the *avatārā* of *Ambāl* as *Pārvathī* happened during the time of the burning of *Kāma*, that is when *Kāma* met with failure at the hands of *Īśvarā* and was indeed reduced to ashes. That the Lord

later fell in love with Pārvathī and married her is not attributed to the work of *Kāma* nor described as his victory. It was *Ambālī*'s unalloyed love for the Lord and the amazingly intense austerities practiced by her that moved *Dakṣiṇāmūrti* (*Śiva* in his quiescent form) and made him *Kalyāṇasundara*.

The story told in the Skanda Purāṇa and adapted by *Kālidāsa* (in his *Kumārasambhavam*) is the same. In the previous stanza it is stated that *Kāma* created passion in the seers but there is no mention of his having triumphed over *Īśvarā*, though it refers to the story of *Mahā Viṣṇu* assuming the form of *Mōhini*. *Viṣṇu* is the father of *Kāma*, born of his mind, and hence called 'Manasija'. During his *avatārā* as *Kṛishṇa*, Manmatha was born as his son Pradyumna. The father himself, that is *Viṣṇu*, cast his spell (as *Mōhini*) on *Paramaśiva* and his (*Viṣṇu*'s) son Manmatha enchants all the rest including great seers. The '*Saundaryalaharī*' section, mentions that Manmatha triumphed over the Lord. The two ear-ornaments of *Ambālī* are reflected in her mirror-like face, which is like a chariot with these rings as its wheels (the two actual ear-rings and their reflected images). It is stated (Stanza 59) that Manmatha goes to battle with *Īśvara* riding this chariot. *Ambālī*'s loving glance is Manmatha's discharge of his arrow at *Īśvara*, so says one of the stanzas... [The Great Preceptor pauses - No, it is in two stanzas (52 and 58). Another stanza (86) mentions Manmatha approaching *Śiva* riding his chariot, discharging his arrow, his conquest of the Lord and his cries of victory. But in the first section of the hymn this (Manmatha's victory) is not mentioned. It has been reserved for the second part in which there is more poetic beauty and aesthetic appeal.

What I wished to say is that the deity of the hymn is *Kāmēśvarī* is not completely disclosed yet. But in the stanzas so far the *Āchāryā* has given us plenty of hints to help us guess as to who it is. But since he does not want to keep us guessing, in the next

stanza, which is like a dhyāna *śloka*, the form of *Kāmēśvarī* is fully described.

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NOT ŚIVA AND ŚAKTHI BUT ŚIVAŚAKTHI

The description of *Kāmēśvarī* will not be right or complete without her being shown as seated on the left side of the lap of *Kāmēśvara*. However, in sculptures and paintings it is rarely that she is seen in this manner. The reason may be that if *Ambāl* were shown in a 'gross' form like this, her importance would not be fully revealed and half of it might seem to be shared by her husband. In *Kāncīpuram* itself is not *Ambāl* seen unaccompanied by *Kāmēśvara*? Although there is another reason for it she will lose her importance if *Īśvarā* is the central figure and she occupies his left side, That is why all representations generally of *Ambāl* including Ravi Varma's *Rājarājēśvari*, are without her consort. One feels that at least for a change *Kāmēśvarī* must be shown with *Kāmēśvara* by some artist. When two deities, bearing four similar weapons, are seated close together it is very difficult to sculpt their figures or paint them in a way that people who see them do not get confused about the two bows the two arrows and so on. The skill of an artist lies in surmounting such a difficulty and sculpt or paint the figures beautifully.

Mention of the name of *Kāmēśvarī* at once brings to mind the name of *Kāmēśvara*. It may be because it is not proper to mention a female deity in her plain single form that we have names like *Rājarājēśvari*, *Lalithāmbāl*, *Thripurasundari*. If we examine the manthra *Śāsthṛā* carefully we will note that, apart from bearing in her hands the bow, the arrow, the noose and the goad, *Rajarajesvari* must bear in two of the four additional hands books and the rosary (*akshamāla*) and the other two hands must be her *abhaya-hastha* and *vara hastha*. Besides, she must have the *vīṇā* leaning over her bosom. *Lalitha-Thripurasundari* is in the squatting

position, while *Rājarejēśvari* has her right leg bent in and her left leg hanging down from her seat: it is thus that she is usually visualised. As *Kāmēśvarī* we must picture her to ourselves thus: she seated on the left side of *Kāmēśvarā*, bearing in her hands the bow, the arrows, the noose and the goad; she has only four hands and her right leg is bent in and her left leg hangs down from her seat. The Lord, her husband, has his right leg hanging down from his seat and his left leg folded in *Ambālī* is seated on the folded part of his lap.

In the *dhyāna-sloka*, *Lalithā*-[*Mahā*]-*Thripurasundari* and *Rājarājēśvari* are not mentioned as seated on *Īśvarā*'s left lap but as independent deities without the consort. When we have to keep our minds one-pointed and meditate on the presiding deity of a manthra, and mutter her names, we cannot do so visualising a figure with two faces.

In one stanza (23) of the *Saundaryalaharī* the *Āchāryā* indicates the reason for regarding *Ambālī* as a deity not accompanied by her consort. *Ambālī* is not satisfied with stealing half of her husband's body in the *Ardhanārīśvarā* form. So she takes over his right side also: she remains a lone deity with her complexion of red but with her husband's characteristics of the eye on the forehead and the crescent moon in her hair.

One of the ways of *Ambālī* worship is based on the belief that *Īśvarā* has no form of his own nor any function. Even if he has them he owes them to her. Where is his power to accept our worship and bestow his grace? So he is not included in the worship. *Pūjā* is performed to *Ambālī* alone who has a form and a function.

It is in keeping with such beliefs that the *Āchāryā* has composed what may be regarded as a *dhyāna-sloka* in which *Ambālī* is described as being unaccompanied by *Kāmēśvara*.

The *Āchāryā* commences his hymn mentioning two deities, *Śiva* and *Śakthi*. But his goal is adoring a deity who is the *Śakthi* of

Śiva. He has composed the very first stanza with the thought that he must begin his hymn by mentioning first the father-mother pair (*Śiva* and *Ambāl* or *Śakthi*), that the first to be mentioned must be the husband of *Ambāl* to proclaim her saumangalyam, that he must be mentioned first and then she to make known her pathivrathya. But, in the later stanzas, he thought *Śiva* must not be made to share the importance of *Ambāl*. He has composed his verses describing *Ambāl* alone, that is instead of the two, *Śiva* and *Śakthi*, a single entity that is *Śivasakthi*. (The stanza containing this description comes next.)

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PORTRAIT OF AMBĀL

Kvaṇāthkāñchī-dhāma kari-kalabha-kumbha-sthana nathā
Parikshīṇā madhye pariṇātha-saracchandra vadanā
Dhanur bāṇāṇ pāśam sruṇimapi dadhāṇā karathalaih
Purasthādāsthām nah puramathithurāhōpurushika

'*Kvaṇāth kāñchīdhama*'. '*Kvaṇāth*' means the tinkling of the tiny bells fitted in ornaments. A girdle fitted with bells is '*kāñchī*'. One without bells is '*mēkhalā*'. '*Raṇātkinkirī-mēkhalā*' which occurs in the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam* denotes the same as '*kvaṇāthkāñchīdhama*'. '*Kāñchī*' is called '*maṇimēkhalā*'. One of the five 'Tamil epic poems is *Maṇimēkhalai*. It is said that the heroine of the poem who bears the same name as its title came to *Kāñchīpuram* during the last days of her life and there, when there was a famine, fed the hungry and suffering people from her akshayapatra. *Maṇimēkhalai* is a Buddhist work. *Maṇimēkhalai* had her initiation from a Buddhist guru in *Kāñchī* and found fulfillment of her life, it is said. But the story of her feeding the starving people from her *aksayapātra* seems to have been copied from the account of the sport of *Kāmākshī*. With a small measure of rice, which increased in quantity and was never exhausted,

Ambāl gave food to all. Not only that, she practised the 32 dharmas. According to tradition there are in all 64 dharmas. These are 'condensed' into half, that is 32 dharmas. Some people may believe that the *Kāmākshī Purānā* is based on the story of *Manīmēkhalai*. But the fact is the name of *Kāmākshī* goes back to a time much earlier than that of *Manīmēkhalai* and existed during the Sangam period. There was a woman scholar called 'Kāmakannīyār Nappasalaiyār' during the Sangam age. 'Kamakanni' means only 'Kāmākshī'. If the worship of *Kāmākshī* was prevalent then her story must have also existed then-including in it the account of her distributing food to the poor. If there was a time when the name of *Rāmā* was known, the story of *Rāmā* (the *Ramāyāna*) must have also existed then. I say this to underline the appropriateness of *Manīmēkhalai* (which name means the same as *Kānchī*) coming to *Kānchī* during the last years of her life.

'Kvañath Kānchīdhāmā'. There is a hint here that the subject of the hymn is *Lalithāmbāl* because of the word 'kānchī' used in it. In this land *Ambāl* is worshipped in many forms from Kanyakumari in the south to *Kshīrabhavāni* in Kashmir in the north': *Bhagavati*, *Chāmundēsvari*, *Śaradāmbāl*, *Mīnākshī*, *Akhilāndēsvari*, *Dharmasamvardhini*, *Kamalāmbā*, *Bālāmbā*, *Śivakamasundari*, *Jnānāmba*, *Bhramarāmbāl*, *Kanakadurgā*, *Tuljā Bhavāni*, *Ambāji*, *Vindhyāvāsini*, *Annapurnēsvari*, *Kālī*, *Kāmākhyā*, *Vaishṇavi*, etc. But the deity mentioned in the *Śrīvidhya* texts, the deity with all the attributes and weapons of *Lalithā-Thripurasundari*, can only be the *Kāmākshī* of *Kānchīpuram*. That is why the saying: even if you mention the name of the place you must not mention the name of the person. In this hymn, though *Ambāl*'s name is not mentioned, it seems the *Āchāryā* has perhaps suggested the name by mentioning, or hinting at, her place through the term 'Kānchīdhāmā'.

When the earth itself is regarded as a female deity - don't we say *Bhūmādevī*? -- the place where her navel, the navel of the earth

goddess, is situated is *Kānchīpuram*. Since the girdle's front part is above the navel the place is called *Kānchī*.

'*Kānchīdhāmā*': '*dhāmā*' means a rope made of a number of strands tightened together. *Krishṇa* came to be called *Damodara* from the fact that *Yasōdha* bound him with a rope passing round his abdomen. Since the girdle with bells is made of strands of gold that the *Āchāryā* calls it '*Kānchī dhāmā*'.

When *Ambālī* comes walking it is not only her anklets that jingle but also the bells of her girdle.

A girdle that starts with the centre of the earth and, going round, returns to the centre must be immensely big. Since it entwines *Ambālī*'s waist we are likely to think that her waist is very huge. But, as a matter of fact, how is it?

'Parikshīṇā madhyē'

Ambālī's waist is very thin. '*Kshīṇā*' means 'thin'. With the prefix '*pari*' it means 'very thin'. This is a characteristic of women belonging to the highest category. *Ambālī* is the confluence of all wonderful things. Like '*mahat*' in an '*anu*', like the infinite in an atom - all the worlds are in the thin waist.

Leave alone the beauty of *Ambālī*'s waist. What about her face? Is not the face the most important part of the body, '*mukhya*'? Now the word '*mukhya*' itself is derived from '*mukha*', face. We say that 'of the body measuring eight spans the head is the most important'. Now to come back to the question: What is *Ambālī*'s face like?

'Parīṇatha-saracchandra-vadanā.'

The '*pari*' in '*parikshīṇā*' with which the first half of the line begins is used again at the start of the second half of the line in '*parīṇatha*'. Such usage adds beauty to a poem and is a help in remembering it. In the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam* there are many examples of such usage.

When describing the face of *Ambāl*, the *Āchāryā* says it is 'saracchandra-vadanā', a face like the autumnal moon. Its whiteness has a special quality. In autumn the weather is pleasantly cool. 'Pariṇatha' means fully grown and refers to the full moon, the autumnal full moon. *Ambāl*'s face being radiant like the autumn full moon is hinted at, a face that showers the moonlight of grace. [In a later stanza (63) the *Āchāryā* describes this idea with poetic elegance, 'Smitha jyothsna jalam thava vadanachandrasya pibathām.'

Mention has been made of the girdle, of the waist round which it is worn and above all of the face. Should not the hands too be described now? A deity is identified by the number of hands he or she possesses and the weapons borne by him or by her.

'Dhanur-bāñān pāśam srutimapi dadhānā karathalaih'

Ambāl carries in her hands the bow, the arrows, the noose and the goad. These are the most important distinguishing marks of the presiding deity of the *Srīvidhya thanthra*. *Lalitha-Mahā - Thripurasundari*, *Kāmēśvarī*, these are her names. If we do not go 'technically' too far into the subject, she is also to be understood as *Rajarājēśvarī*. *Ambikā* in this form has four hands-the upper two bear the noose and the goad, the lower two the bow and the arrows. The bow and the arrows are the same as *Manmatha*'s: sugarcane and flowers. 'Rāga' and 'dvēsha', love and hate, are two urges, likes and dislikes; what you accept and what you reject. If you think deeply about the subject you will realise that all worldly life is enfolded by these two urges. *Rāga* and *dvēsha* are also understood to be *kāma* and *krōdha*, desire and anger. Both must be kept under restraint. The two are the products of *Ambāl*'s sport of *Māyā* and they disappear in her sport of grace (*anugraha līlā*). If we keep reminding ourselves of this we shall be able to hold them in check. 'Rāga-svarūpapāśādhyā', one with the noose that is desire.

‘*Krōdhākarankusōjjvāla*’, one who shines with the goad that is anger: these names occur in the *Lalithā Sahasranāmam*.

Of *kāma* and *krōdha*, *Ambāl*’s noose symbolises *kāma* or desire. ‘*Pāśa*’ means rope or noose. The noose that Yama casts is known as ‘*Yama-pāśa*’. We say that *āśā*- (desire) is also a ‘*pāśa*’. *Āśā* is *kāma*. Like a noose *āśā* or desire keeps us bound. The goad symbolises *krōdha* or anger. Anger is like the goad that pierces you, provokes you. Yes, it pierces you, not someone else. The other man may ignore our anger but we hurt ourselves with it, keep creating a sore with the goad of anger. Modern scientists speak of the energy wasted in anger. They also speak of another interesting aspect of it and it is in agreement with the *Śāsthrās* : if we waste our energy fuming in anger about what we do not like, we waste more energy when we are happily involved in what we are fond of, that is *kāma*. *Kāma* is what is called ‘*hitha-sathru*’; pretending to do us good it digs our grave.

Mention of the goad (*ankusa*) reminds me of the elephant. The noose (*pāśā*) is also associated with that animal. The elephant has always to be kept in chains. That chain is *pāśā*. *Kāma* and *krōdha* are indeed elephantine in proportion: that is why they are shown to be kept under check by *pasankusa* (by the noose and the goad). What do we mean by saying that desire and anger are kept under check? It means nothing but keeping the mind under control, the mind in which the two (*kāma* and *krōdha*) sprout. In his *Śivānandalaharī*, the *Āchāryā* likens the mind to an elephant in rut: ‘*hrudhaya madhebham*’ (*madha-ibham* = an elephant in rut).

An explanation for *Ambāl* bearing the noose and the goad in her hands : even this is her sport and an important aspect of her *Māyā*. Another explanation: she places her affection (*pāśā*) in us, binds us with the *pāśa* or noose in her hand, drags us away from the other *pāśās* that bind us-and when she does so we hug her with

affection, crying, 'Mother'. She gives us the 'attachment that is free from attachments'. Likewise she directs her anger against our anger, pierces our anger with the goad that symbolises anger, subdues it and makes it calm.

In the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*, the bow and the arrows are mentioned after the noose and the goad. Usually however, in the *Sahasranāmam* the *pāśā* and *ankuṣa* are mentioned first and then only the bow and the arrows. This order appears to be reasonable. The bow and the arrows are important chiefly for Manmatha, are they not? If the same are mentioned for *Ambāl* her importance will not be known. Besides, though Manmatha is apparently responsible for creation and our bondage the true cause behind both is *Ambāl*. When the two weapons are in her hands, we must not forget that she is the one who also frees us from bondage. When Manmatha's bow and arrows change places and go into her hands they stand for release from bondage—I shall come to this subject later. If the two were to be mentioned first the impression might be created that she is a copy of Manmatha. It is because such an impression must not be created that the noose and the goad are first mentioned in her case, the noose and the goad that are specially meant for forms of *Ambāl* like *Bhuvanēśvari*. The sugarcane and the flower arrows are assigned to *Srungāra* or the erotic which is among the many types of *kāma* (*Srungāra* is the most powerful of them and makes a man slip and fall); the noose is assigned for the rest of the types of *kāma*; and for the force which is the opposite of *kāma*, anger, is assigned the goad.

Krōdha or anger is *āśā* or desire unrequited. If we fail in anything we become angry. [Failure gives rise to anger.] If you interpret *āśā* as attachment for *Ambāl*, and *krōdha* or anger as anger against anger, the noose and goad will become the means of release from bondage. In this way the concept of *Ambāl* is fully expressed.

After mentioning *pāsā* for *rāga*, (the noose for desire), and *ankuṣa* for *krōdha*, (the goad for anger), the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam* mentions two names based on the bow and arrows *Ambāl* carries in her hands '*Manōrupēkshu-kōdhandā*' and '*Pancha-thanmāthra-sayakā*', 'the symbol of the mind that is the sugarcane bow' and 'the one with the arrows that are symbols of the five *thanmāthrās*'. '*Thanmāthrās*' here must be understood as the five senses that enjoy the *thanmāthrās*.

Manmatha has only two weapons in his hands. And *Ambāl* too carries the same weapons to proclaim to the world that it is she as Akhilānda-Chakravarthini, the queen-empress of the entire cosmos, who has appointed him as the authority to create carnal pleasure in the world. Not only that. I spoke about the noose and the goad signifying bondage and liberation. The same is to be said about the bow and the arrows too. When they are in the hands of Manmatha, the bow thrusts the minds of men into carnal pleasure while the arrows of flowers cast them into the trap of the five senses. But when they are in the hands of *Ambāl*, what do they do? The bow draws our minds into desire for liberation and the five arrows too have the same purpose—they turn our five senses towards *Ambāl* and purify them. They create the desire in us to listen to songs sung in her praise, to touch her lotus feet, to behold her form, to taste the ambrosia that the water lavng her feet is and to gather her *nirmalya* flowers and experience their divine fragrance. When the bow and arrows are with manmatha they excite our minds and senses and involve us in carnal pleasure. But when the same are in the lands of *Ambāl* they turn our minds and senses towards her, towards *Ambāl* who is not only the cause of carnal pleasure but also of eternal happiness. The same weapons when they change hands have different uses. The robber points the knife at us threatening to finish us off. But when the same knife comes to our hands he takes to his heels.

When the sugarcane bow and the flower arrows are in the hands of Manmatha, the juice of the sugarcane and the nectar of the flowers flow as *kāmarasa* to delude the world and ensnare it in carnal pleasure. The same weapons in the hands of *Ambāl* create a flow of the rasa of her compassion. And, correspondingly, devotion for her, the Mother, wells up in our hearts. In the flow of her compassion and our devotion, we forget ourselves and experience the bliss of liberation. What keeps us in delusion is *Māyā*--it is very bad. What makes us forget ourselves is *jnāna*--the highest of all that is good.

In short, the flower arrows of *Ambāl* annihilate our sensual urges and her sugarcane bow eradicates our mind. When this happens we realise *jnāna*, liberation. Do we need to have anything more?

It is customary to say that the five senses that are purified by the five arrows and the mind that is cleansed by the sugarcane bow together form the six *Karaṇas*. Just as the honey-bee has six legs an individual has six *Karaṇas*. Our life is like a bee with six *Karaṇas* and charaṇas and just as a bee becomes embedded in a lotus so our Self should become absorbed in the lotus feet of *Ambāl*. So the *Āchāryā* says (in Stanza 90) '*Nimajjan majjivah Karaṇacharaṇah shadcharaṇatham.*'

A point to be noted is this. It is not stated in the stanza that our senses and our-mind must be tamed by *Ambāl*'s bow and arrows. They must be brought to subjection at her feet. 'You need not grant me refuge or give me boons with your hands. Your feet themselves will do the same for me.' the *Āchāryā* says in an earlier verse. Here (in Stanza 7) instead of the hands held in the vara and abhaya mudras, he has mentioned the bow and arrows borne by them. The functions performed by them of doing away with the mind and the senses, will they not be performed by *Ambāl*'s lotus feet? It is in answer to this that the *Āchāryā* says later that the bee

that stands for the mind and the senses will become embedded in her lotus feet. Our desire and anger that are subdued by her noose and goad will also be held in check if we clasp her feet.

The question arises: why should *Ambāl* have four hands? It is precisely because she is beautiful to behold in her form with the four hands. Apart from being beautiful she is also the queen-empress. It is to denote her majesty that she has the bow and arrows in the other hands. A king (or a hero) is usually depicted with bow and arrows—for instance, *Rāma* and *Arjuna*. They are weapons to attack foes who are far away. Military science itself is called *dhanurvedha*. That is why the great, great, queen *Ambāl* is chiefly represented with bow and arrows.

Ambāl is the queen of the empire of *jnāna*. To indicate that she is the one who liberates she is shown with her other two hands carrying the noose and the goad, the weapons that create *jnāna* by destroying desire and anger (*rāga* and *dvēsha*).

It is to show that she herself draws away the mind and the senses – the mind and the senses that we should ourselves offer at her feet that she keeps the bow and arrows in her hands. It is as if she lifts us up with her hand saying, ‘Why should the child fall at my feet?’

With the bow and arrows, *Ambāl* turned *Īśvarā*, who was all *jnāna*, towards *kāma* for the well-being of the world and to make him the embodiment of the sport of grace and she herself became *Śivakāmasundari*. It is with the same weapons that she protects all mankind by holding their minds and senses in her hands. This idea is expressed here like a *dhyāna śloka*. The *Āchāryā* concludes by saying that the functions performed by the bow and arrows are performed by *Ambāl*’s feet.

Let me explain. Each weapon has a particular power. But what is the source of this power? The source is *Ambāl*, the power

is what is granted by her. We who have no strength of our own need weapons for success in battles. As for *Ambāl* she possesses all strength and is indeed the source of all strength. The weapons carry out her resolve receiving that strength of hers in the manner and measure determined by her. Although her mere resolve is enough to accomplish a task it is as a sport and for the joy to be derived from it that she carries it out through these weapons or other instruments.

It would be enough to hold her feet : by her resolve born of her compassion she would give us her blessings whether it is for freedom from fear, the acquiring of any boons, eradication of the mind and the senses, whatever. But for the sake of sport she would seem to carry out our wishes through her weapons or hand gestures-or she may not do so. What others do with these weapons she may do the opposite [when they are in her hands].

If *Paramēśvarā* were to remain in quietude as a *jnāna* the world would not go on and the divine sport would not be conducted. That is why when *Kāma* met with failure (that is when his efforts to inspire desire in *Śiva* did not succeed) *Ambāl* wielded her bow and arrows and by attracting *Śiva* towards herself brought him into the sphere of divine sport. Apart from that, carrying the same weapons, she made *Śiva* himself the deity of *Srungāra*. Then she restored *Kāma* to life and gave him again the authority to inspire *kāma* in all sentient beings. But still she retained these weapons with herself.

But now she changed the functions of the weapons. The weapons that draw the senses and the mind into carnal pleasure, she began to use them to draw people unto herself. People have to experience *kāma* and other pleasures according to their karma and for this purpose she gave the weapons to Manmatha. But they should not keep their burden of karmā growing and they must return to her (become liberated). It is for this purpose that she

bears the weapons in her hands (she uses them to draw people unto herself).

So, though she carries the weapons of Manmatha, she creates *kāma* only in Manmathari (that is *Paramasiva*, the enemy of Manmatha). For others she brings release from kama. She is *Śivakāmasundari* only for *Śiva* who is *jnāna* incarnate: for her devotees she is *Jnānāmbāl*. As for Manmatha, with the same weapons he drags all sentient beings into carnal pleasure. But he is powerless before *Īśvarā* who reduced him to ashes.

The *Āchāryā* first portrays *Ambāl*'s form, her four hands, her thin waist adorned with the girdle and her face that is like the autumnal full moon. After describing her physical form, he speaks about the inward truth of *Ambāl*, the 'essence' of the *Ambāl* concept: '*Puramathithuh Āhōpurishikā*'. Superficially the words mean: 'The embodiment of the pride of the destroyer of Thripura'. Considered a little more deeply, the words would mean that *Ambāl* is the embodiment of his, *Śiva*'s, 'I feeling'. Though *Ambāl* bears the same weapons as *Kāma*, the bow and the arrows, she is indeed the *Chithsakthi* of the *Parabrahmam*, truly *Jnānāmbāl*. I have already spoken about it.

'*Purasthād āstām.*' 'May she. shine in front of us.' 'May the one who wears the tingling girdle round her delicate waist, the one whose face is like the autumnal full moon, and the one who bears in her hands the bow and arrows and the noose and the goad-the one who is the embodiment of *Paramasiva*'s *parāhanthā*--may she reveal herself before us.' says the *Āchāryā*. She must shine in front of all of us, so he prays. Not in front of 'me' alone. He prays on behalf of all of us. '*Purasthād āsthām nah.*' 'Nah' means 'us', not 'me'.

It is for us to see her with our mind's eye that the *Āchāryā* has portrayed her so beautifully in this stanza.

Ambāl has some more distinguishing features: the crescent moon on her head, the eye in the forehead, the *Pancha-Brahmāsana*, the most important: she looks radiant in her complexion of red. These are dealt with in some of the subsequent stanzas. but, even without the mention of such distinguishing marks, we see clearly from the stanza who the deity of the hymn is.

The *Āchāryā* describes the residence of *Lalithāmbāl* in the next stanza. *Abhirāmi Anthadhi* is also about *Lalithāmbāl*. The (*Thirukkadvūr*) *Abhirāmi* does not bear in her hands the bow and arrows and the noose and the goad. She is, according to the tradition of Chola art, seen with the hand gestures of *vara* and *abhaya*, with the *pundarika* and the *akshamāla* (rosary). But it was *Lalithāmbikā* [with the distinguishing features mentioned above] who revealed herself before *Abhirāmbhatta*. In the *Anthādhi* in the second stanza-it is like a *dhyāna-sloka*-he has described *Ambāl* as carrying the bow and arrows and the noose and the goad. In the concluding stanzas also he speaks of these characteristics.

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AMBIKĀ'S RESIDENCE

Sudhāsindhōr-madhyē suravitapi-vātī-parivruthē
Manidhvīpē nīpōpavanavathi Chinthāmaṇi-gruhe
Śīvākāre manchē Paramasiva-paryankanilayām
Bhajanthi thvām dhanyāh kathichana chidhānandhalaharīm

The abode of *Śiva* is *Kailāsā* and of *Vishṇu* *Vaikuntha*. Similarly, *Lalithāmbāl* has a world of her own. *Śiva* and *Vishṇu* have only one abode; *Lalithāmbāl* has two residences. one is in what is called *Brahmānda* and on one of the peaks of *Mēru* around which all the planets revolve. On the three other peaks of *Meru* are *Brahmalōka*, *Vishṇulōka* and *Śivalōka*. *Ambāl*'s world, it is said, is

in the centre of these three peaks, on the reigning peak so to speak. This is referred to in the name 'Sumērumadhyasrungasthā' occurring in the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*. *Ambālī*'s second abode is outside *Brahmānda*. She has created a vast ocean of ambrosia and in the midst of it she resides on an island. In the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*, after this residence in the ocean of ambrosia is referred to, occurs the name 'Kāmākshī': 'Sudhā-sāgaramadhyasthā', 'Kāmākshī', 'Kāmadhāyini'. It is this abode that the *Āchāryā* describes here [in Stanza 8]. This is the world created by *Ambālī* herself. The one on *Mēru*'s central peak was built by the celestial carpenter *Viśvakarmā* with the power granted to him by *Ambālī*. *Ambālī* appeared once to slay *Bhandāsura*, an enemy of the celestials. At once the celestials exclaimed: 'She indeed is our queen *Rajarājēśvari*.' Then they performed her coronation. *Viśvakarma* built a palace for the queen with many fortresses on the *Mēru* peak, a *Śrīpura*. However, what the *Āchāryā* describes here is the *Śrīpura* in the ocean of ambrosia.

Whether it is on the central *Mēru* peak or in the ocean of ambrosia there is no difference between the two abodes of *Ambālī*. From the outermost fortress to the palace proper--where she is seated in regal splendour--the *prākārās*, the lakes, the entourages are the same. This capital of hers is called *Śrīpura* or *Śrinagāra*. It is encircled by twenty five fortresses and *prākārās*. The fortresses are built of metals ranging from iron to gold and of the nine gems. Then, proceeding further in degrees of subtlety, there are fortresses of the mind, of intelligence, of ego. Lastly there are strongholds built each of the radiance of the sun, the radiance of the moon and of the lustre of *Manmatha*. Between the fortresses there are forests, parks of divine trees and streams and canals. When going past all these, in the twenty-fifth *āvāraṇa*--same as *prākārā* - is the *Mahāpadmavanā*, a canal full of lotuses. It is like a moat and in it is *Ambālī*'s palace, built not of red bricks but of *Chinthāmanis*.

The queen residing in the palace is *Rajarājēśvari*. When we view her thus she conducts her *darbar* seated on the throne in the royal assembly. The four legs and the seat of her throne are the *PanchaBrahmās*. From this throne, seated on the lap of *Kāmēśvara*, she holds court. When we view her not as one in a position of authority, not as a queen, but as one embodying the *Srungāra* that turned the Brahman into sport, she gives *dharsan* not in the open royal assembly but in her inner apartment, all by herself. To obtain that *dharsan* we must eradicate our senses totally. To qualify for it we must grasp the inner meaning of *Srungārā*, and we must indeed have the maturity to become immersed in this meaning. The *PanchaBrahmāsana*, the throne in the royal assembly, is now in her inner apartment, a couch on which she is seated with *Kāmēśvara*.

In the *Śrīpura*, on the central peak of *Mēru*, she is the queen conducting her royal assembly and she is higher than all the celestials. In the centre of the ocean of ambrosia she is Mother, the pathivrathā consort of *Kāmēśvara* for seekers belonging to a high plane. She is Mother and father in one and her blessings will be such as to take us so far as to bring about our union as children with this Mother-Father entity.

The *Āchāryā* describes briefly the residence of *Ambāl*, starting from the ocean of ambrosia to the lap of *Kāmēśvara*.

In the centre of the ocean of ambrosia--..There are five trees notable in the celestial world: *mandārā*, *Pārijātha*, *santhāna*, *kalpaka*, and *harichandana*. The island, called *Manīdvīpa*, has forests of such trees. The earth here is not soil or stone but all precious gems. That is why the island is called 'Manīdvīpa'.

Here, in *Manīdvīpa*, is the garden that is full of nipa trees-- nipa is the same as kadamba ... Madhura (Madurai) which is a place dear to *Ambāl* was once a kadamba forest. In *Manīdvīpa* there is a garden of kadamba trees. '*Kadambavana-vāsinīm*'.

'Kadambavana-chariṇīm' ['Kadambavana-sālayā', 'Kadambavana- madhyakām'] : the Āchāryā has composed a hymn using such words in line after line. Even children taught these verses would love to learn them and recite them. *Ambāl* roams in the kadamba forest joyfully. In Madurai it is a kadamba forest, in *Manīdvīpa* it is a kadamba upavana. 'Upavana' is a small forest, a man-made park. At the edge of the island it is a forest of divine trees, and as we approach the palace it is a kadamba park that we see.

To build towns and townships everywhere we cut down trees indiscriminately. Later we realise that human life itself is threatened in the absence of trees and we observe 'Vanamahōtsava'. We celebrate this utsava or festival merely on paper--so it seems to me. In the old days, when there were not so many towns, there were parks on the outskirts of all places. A capital chithy with a fortress would certainly have such a garden. Apart from preventing an 'upset' in nature, it protected the place from enemy forces.

The palace of *Ambāl* is situated in the park of *nīpā* trees and it glitters, having been built entirely of *Chinthāmanīs*. If all our thoughts were made into gems, if we were to think of *Ambāl* alone and each thought of ours were a gem [a gem of a thought] and if we built a temple to her with these gems, it would also be a *Chinthāmani* house. And she would reside in it--that is reside in our thoughts. It is as a way to it, for *Ambāl* to dwell in us, that we first meditate on her as one who dwells outside of us. In the end she must reside in us. Abhirāmibhatta asks, 'Is your temple here or there? Is it in my heart?' He also says in one of his songs: 'She who is One unfolded herself into many and pervaded the entire world. Then, when the world became extinct, she became the form of the *Athmā*. Such a one, such a Great One, dwells somehow in my tiny heart.'

In the mansion built of *Chinthāmanīs Ambāl* is seated on the couch that has the form of *Śiva*. I spoke to you earlier of the *PanchaBrahmāsana*. Upon the five (Panchabrahma) is *Kāmēśvara* or *Paramasiva* who personifies the *Parabrahmam* and on his lap is seated *Ambāl*, that is on '*Paramasiva paryanka*'. The word '*anka*' by itself means 'lap'. '*Paryanka*' denotes a number of things: bed, bedstead, cloth worn round the hip, and the lap. It also means 'covered litter'. From it is derived 'palanquin' and (the Tamil) *pallakku*.

The bed that is the lap of *Kāmēśvara* is the *paryanka* of *Ambāl*.

The *Āchāryā* does not call the one seated on the *paryanka* *Kāmēśvarī*, *Rajarājēśvarī* or *Srungarasundari*. He elevates her to the heights of *jñāna* by giving her the name of '*Chidānandalaharī*'. This is what is great about the *Āchāryā*'s literary genius. Even though *Ambāl* is with the Lord as *Srungāra* personified what is denoted is *Āthma-Srungāra*. Is it not the bliss of love, the cascading joy of the consciousness that is not separated from the Truth? Being seated on this or that seat, being in this or that world or in this or that house is in fact the flow of the bliss of consciousness this is the idea with which the *Āchāryā* concludes the stanza.

A few fortunate people, the *Āchāryā* says, worship 'you who are the flood of the bliss of consciousness in such a residence.' '*Bhajanthe thvām dhanyāh kathichana*'. In prose order the same is: '*Kathicana dhanyāh thvām bhajanthe*.' It means, 'A few fortunate people worship you.'

Why only 'a few'? Are there not many people who perform *pūjā* to *Dēvī*? Their number is increasing day by day. But mumbling some words and burning camphor, would that be puja in the true sense?

Then what is true puja?

Did I not describe *Ambāl*'s form in the previous stanza? We must visualise that form and have it imprinted in our hearts. We must also imagine that we too live in *Ambāl*'s residence. We must imagine that her grace is the ocean of ambrosia and the forest of Kalpaka trees surrounding us, that in her grace our earth has become gem encrusted, that our *pūjā* room is built of the *Chinthāmanis* that grant us all our wishes. This is what is called 'sālōkya mōksha'. It is generally believed that going to the world of our chosen deity is *sālōkya mōksha*. It seems to me that even better than this is to think that the place where we live, wherever it be, is the world of our chosen deity.

Beyond *sālōkyam* is 'sāmīpyam' (that is to go near, or close to, our chosen deity). To proceed from the shores of the ocean of ambrosia via the forest, park and so on to *Ambāl*'s bedstead in her palace is *sāmīpyam*.

Further to *sālōkyam* and *sāmīpyam* is 'sārūpyam'. Just as the worm constantly thinking of the wasp becomes a wasp, so if we keep contemplating *Ambāl*'s form we too will become that form. We must become absorbed in the description of *Ambāl*'s form contained in the previous stanza and meditate on that form visualising her as seated on the lap of *Paramasiva*. This will lead to our sārūpya liberation.

The ultimate in liberation is *sāyujya*, becoming one with our chosen deity. That is, apart from being identical in form with the deity, we become one with that deity, become the same Truth as that deity. It is this Truth that the *Āchāryā* calls 'chidānandalaharī', the flow of consciousness that is the infinite bliss. We must become dissolved in that lahari : this is *sāyujya*. After this there is no *pūjā* for us to perform. Until we continue to be in the state in which we have to perform *pūjā* we must cultivate the attitude of dissolving non-dualistically in the *chidānandalahari*.

Reaching *Ambāl*'s world, beholding her form, becoming dissolved in the reality that she is: let these happen in due time. But now itself we must mentally attune ourselves to these states. When we sit down to perform puja our mind must be fully engrossed in her. 'Is it already late for our office? What will be the special dish in the canteen?' Such thoughts must not distract you. Your mind must be immersed in the waves of the ocean of ambrosia and finally in the Reality that *Ambāl* is, the flood of the ocean of *chidānandā*, the bliss of consciousness.

Do we perform *pūjā* in this manner? Perhaps a few of us do. Only those who have earned merit by their past actions perform *pūjā* with such intensity as to realise *chidānanda* rasa in her form. The *Āchāryā* has referred to these very few fortunate people, '*kathichana dhanyāh*'.

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IN THE KUNDALINI FORM

The worship of *Ambāl* through *Kuṇḍalini* *yōga* and through manthra *yōga* and the fruits yielded by such forms of worship are mentioned in some of the subsequent stanzas.

Six chakras in the human body, also called lotuses, are mentioned in *Kundalini* *yōga*. The *Āchāryā* says that *Ambāl* resides in these chakras: in the first five chakras, in the ascending order, as the five *thāthvas* from earth to space and as mind in the sixth. Through the lotuses runs the *sushumnānādi* at the upper end of which is the one-thousand-petalled *sahasrāra* lotus in which *Ambāl* becomes united with her husband *Śīva*. This means that when the individual Self is brought by the force of *Kuṇḍalini* to merge here (in the *sahasrāra*) *Ambāl* grants it non-dualistic bliss. This is mentioned in the next stanza (9). 'What is in the macrocosm is in the microcosm.' When *Ambāl* unfolds herself as the *prapancha* or cosmos, what exists in it as the *mahabhūthās* and the *mahath* that which is the *Mahāmanas* that orders the worlds in

it -if one practices *yōga* these can be experienced in one's *Kuṇḍalini chakras*. The *Mahāmanas* unites in the sahasradhāja lotus with the Brahman that is *Śiva* and one obtains non-dual realization.

The experience of Adhvaithic rasa becoming the experience of amrutha rasa is dealt with in the next stanza (10). The rasa of realising Adhvaitha, *Ambāl* who grants it and the individual self who receives it : there is no difference between the three. This phenomenon is beyond description and it is only as a formality that it is called '*rasānubhava*' (experiencing the rasa). However, before it happens and after it happens, there is a state approximating to that experience and there are three entities in it-the rasa, the one who provides it and the one who receives it. I spoke about lotuses. They are not like the lotuses growing in a pond. The lotuses of our ponds bloom only in the sun. In moonlight they fold. The warmth of fire will make them wilt. But these *Kuṇḍalini* lotuses bloom in the *Kāṇḍas*, (Sections, regions) the *Agni Kāṇḍa*, the *Sun Kāṇḍa* and the *Moon Kāṇḍa*. In the end, there is in the head the full moon that makes the sahasramra - padma (the one-thousand-petalled lotus) blossom. From it will flow ambrosia as moonlight. That is what is called rasa and it is provided by *Ambāl*.

On the face of the moon *Ambāl*'s divine feet will appear as the feet of our sadguru. It is from them indeed that ambrosia flows. The same is shown as if it were made to flow by the moon. The individual Self is the one that receives that ambrosia, the one that knows that ambrosia. But the non-dualistic feeling will be there that it is *Ambāl* who is at once the rasa and the one who experiences that rasa.

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WHATEVER PATH YOU FOLLOW...

'He [that is the Mahasvami] says that he won't have anything to do with *Kuṇḍalini*, and at the same time he wouldn't allow us

also to become interested in it. Then how are we going to obtain all the wonderful experiences provided by the practice of *Kundalini yōga*? He need not have spoken about the subject at all'.

[The Mahaguru's own answer to this.] *Kundalini yōga* is not the only path available to the seeker. Choose any path other than it, adhere to it with a mind that is one-pointed and with faith and sincerity. As you advance to a high state on this path your breathing will change automatically and it will be similar to that of one practising *yōga*. You may not even be aware of it; the breathing will change on its own [without any effort on your part]. Ordinarily, when we are engaged in worldly work, we breathe through the left nostril. But when we are witnessing a religious festival, when we are happy or when we are in the presence of it great man, our mind is at peace and during this time we breathe through the right nostril. When we go higher on our path we will breathe through both our nostrils and when we go still higher we will stop breathing, that is we will be retaining our breath in what is called 'kumbhaka'. But this does not mean that we will be gasping for breath. We will be feeling easy, feeling light.

Thus the movement of breath will change on its own. Finally (in our quest), in the state before Adhvaithic realisation, the movement of breath will impinge on the nerves in the roof of our head and, touching the feet of *Ambāl*, create a flow of ambrosia. Even in worldly life when we are in an ecstasy of delight our breathing stops and we faint. In this there is reflection of the emotion experienced by us during kumbhaka. During this time we exclaim: 'Ah, I feel cool in the crown of my head.' This also means that a tiny droplet of the ambrosia has trickled down on the nerves in the crown of the head.

I have said this to show that even by following the path of devotion you can have inward experience of a sublime nature.

If we listen to the songs of those who followed exclusively the way of devotion, among them not only the *Śaiva* and *Vaishṇava* devotees of Tamil Nadu but also the devotees of Maharashtra, Bengal, Northern India, the Sufis and Christian mystics, we will discern in them [in the songs of these devotees and mystics] flashes of their perception of *yōga* and *jñāna*.

Here we must speak of the experience of love also. *Icchāśakthi*, the power of desire, which underlies the basic concept of *Kāmēśvara* and *Kāmēśvarī*, belongs to the realm of love (*srungārā*) that is pure and subtle in nature. The word *kāma* itself is a source of embarrassment for us, for a guru or *sanyāsi*, and to speak about it before a public gathering seems improper. However, there is nothing wrong in dealing with it as a concept governing all life. All creation is based on a peaceful basis; it is power that goes on braiding everything together and this is made known symbolically. There is nothing wrong in it. That is why at the end of their spiritual practice *Ambāl* has made it possible for seekers to obtain the experience of *srungārā* in the same way as the experience they have at the end of their quest of *yōga* or *jñāna*. If in the evolution of the Root principle (the *Brahmam*) there appears *icchā* or desire during the stage of involution [the individual Self becoming the *Brahmam*] many great men, before becoming one with the (root principle), have experienced the *nāyikā bhāva* -- the feelings of the *nāyakā* [that is the seeker regards himself as the bride of the deity]. In this stage of involution, one is united with *Śakthi*. Then there is the burning desire to become one with the *nāyakā* that is *Śiva*. In that desire, in the intensity of that feeling, the seeker surrenders to the *nāyakā*, that is *Śiva*, telling himself, 'I have nothing to do on my own. It is all your wish.' Later even this desire to become united with *Śiva* ceases and there remains only the *Icchā* or desire of *Śiva* alone. Which means the involution accomplished by the seeker through his efforts merges in the first stage of *Śiva's* evolution. In that moment as far as the seeker is

concerned *Śiva*, instead of unfolding himself in evolution, receives him within himself in an act of involution. Ordinarily if you throw an object into a stream it is, in the course of its flow, cast ashore, but if there is an undercurrent in the stream it will draw the object in. The latter is the case with the individual Self referred to above.

The initial desire of *Śiva*, the final desire of the seeker: the two take the symbolic form of *Srungāra*, love. This we know from the songs of great men belonging to all religions. We find parallels of this love in the utterances of Sufis, Christian mystics, in the songs of *Maṇikkavāchakar* and *Mīrābai*. The experience of *yōga*, *jñāna* and love is common to all.

Though *Icchā* or desire spoken of here is that of *Śiva* and that of the seeker, the one who causes the pulsation of the consciousness (to produce the desire) is *Ambāl*. The fact of *Śiva* drawing the individual Self [the seeker] unto himself is also her act.

I spoke that in devotion itself one obtains the same experience as that of *yōga*, an experience of a lofty nature. Instead of seeking accomplishment through *yōga* and *thantra*, it would be enough if we, realising that such are beyond our capacity, become engaged in devotion with love, telling ourselves, 'Let us surrender to *Parāśakti*. She is our only refuge.' There would then be no room for self-pride arising from the feeling that 'we are engaged in a great *sādhana*'. Mother herself will lift us up and make it possible for us to experience the highest bliss.

In the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam* [in the context of the lotus of one thousand petals referred to earlier] it is mentioned that when the life force, *prāṇa-sakti*, joins the *sahasrāra*, there is the radiance of the full moon as well as the flow of ambrosia. There is no need to lament that we (those who do not practise *Kuṇḍalīni yōga*) are denied the experience of this kind. We saw earlier the words, '*parīṇatha-saracchandra-vadanā*' (*Stanza 7*). It would be

enough if we keep thinking of *Ambāl*'s face which is like the full moon. It would be enough if we think of the nectar flowing from her sidelong glance and her gentle smile. What we keep thinking about she would make a reality and she would bring us realisation of the inner moon and the inner flow of nectar.

Those who have the strength and the capacity for it, let them take to *Kuṇḍalini* *yōga*. For us there is the easy way of devotion, with unflinching faith in the Mother. She will afford us all those blessings that are made available to the practitioners of *Kuṇḍalini* *yōga*. She may, after a stage, even take us to the way of *Kuṇḍalini* *yōga* and bless us with its rewards. On the other hand, she may push aside those engaged in arduous *yōga*, telling them, 'Enough of all this,' and bid them to surrender to her.

We must consider how the *Āchāryā* concludes the stanza in which he speaks about the way *Ambāl* makes ambrosia flow in the nadhis. She who raises the soul force into the head, instead of uniting the individual Self with herself, makes that power descend again from one chakra into another and with her strength all reduced she remains asleep, coiled up, in the *mūlādhāra chakra*.

The word '*Kuṇḍalini*' suggests the 'coiled up' position during sleep. Like a 'kuṇḍala', ear-ring, the snake that is asleep is all coiled up. When we sleep soundly we stretch our hands and legs fully. Though now and then we sleep crouching or keep tossing in bed, when we are dead asleep our body is fully stretched. But animals, from the cat to the elephant, sleep with the body somewhat bent [crouching], with the head resting on the forelegs. When it is asleep the snake crouches itself in the form of a coil. Only a minuscule fraction of *Parāśakti*'s power is revealed in us: the rest is inactive and is given the name of *Kuṇḍalini* since it remains twisting itself in the *mūlādhāra* like a sleeping serpent. According to legend, the snake sustains itself on air: hence it is called '*pavanāśī*' ['pavana' = air, wind + 'as' to eat]. Since we

retain our vital *prāṇik* power by taking in the air, it [the *prāṇik* power] is called a snake.

The *Āchāryā*, who speaks of the seeker having the near *Adhvaithic* experience of tasting the ambrosia, refers at the same time to *Ambāl* making a sudden descent into the form of a sleeping serpent, denoting our state of being unwise and uncultivated. Also to be noted is that she may push down *yōgis*; who have tasted the ambrosia but are boastful about their 'great *yōgic* prowess'. So even for those who practise *Kuṇḍalīni yōga* the ultimate key to the door of liberation is surrender, the humility that comes of the realisation, 'Not I, but you'.

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THE SRĪCHAKRA AND ITS GREATNESS

In the next stanza (11) the *Āchāryā* describes the *Śrīchakra*. *Śrīchakra* is also known as the *Śrīyanthra*. Mention of '*Śrīvidhyā-pūjā*' evokes the question, 'Is this puja performed after installing the *Śrīchakra*?' The answer is 'Yes'. Each deity has a yantra of his/her own. But those who perform *pūjā* to *Śiva* or *Vishṇu* do not generally do so with yantras. In temples, perhaps, the appropriate yantra is installed in the earth beneath the idol. In some temples the yantra is installed outside, but not in residential houses. Many perform *pūjā* to *Śiva* and *Vishṇu* with a *bāṇa* and *salagrāma* respectively. In the *Panchāyathana pūjā* *Ambāl* is symbolised by the stone called '*svarṇa-rēkha silā*' which is found in Nature. But it is rarely that people perform *pūjā* with it. Those who worship *Subrahmaṇya* have a small spear to represent him. But most deities are worshipped either with icons or stones found in nature. For *Ambāl* alone is there the *Śrīchakra*. It has also become customary, to a small extent, to worship *Ambāl* with an icon and the *Śrīchakra*.

If you take the thanthra pertaining to any deity you will find that there is a yanthra as well as a manthra for the same. If you keep chanting sounds (syllables) arranged in a particular sequence and acquire perfection in doing so you will come face to face with the deity concerned. Such a sequence of sounds is what is called the manthra for a particular deity. Like the hands and feet and other parts of a deity, the group of syllables that invokes him/her also constitutes his/her form -it is a sound form or a manthra form. Along with this the deity has a yanthra form [a diagrammatic form]. Each part of the yanthra, whether it be lines, angle or circles, has not only a meaning of its own but also immense power. Each yanthra is a means to grasp the *Paramātmā* in his manifestation as particular deity. A manthra, apart from being muttered mentally, is also employed in the offering of flowers to the deity being worshipped and in invoking him or her. The letters of the manthra appropriate to a deity are also sometimes inscribed on the yanthra. *Pūjā* is performed to the yanthra, with all the usual rites, in the same way as is done to idols. The reason : the very life or spirit that dwells in the idol also dwells in its yanthra form. As a matter of fact, the yanthra stands not only for a deity but also for his/her place of residence, for his/her retinue and so on.

Ambāl has many aspects and each aspect has a particular yanthra. But we see that *Mīnākshi*, *Durgā*, *Bhuvanēśvari* and *Śaradāmbāl* are worshipped with the *Śrīchakra* [not with the yanthra meant for each of them individually]. This is the case not only with *pūjā* conducted in homes but also in temples. There is a famous temple to *Durgā* in the ambulatory round the hill (giri pradakshina) of Tiruvannamalai. The yanthra in it is the *Śrīchakra*. In the *Śaradāmbāl* temple in *Śrungeri* also *pūjā* is to the *Śrīchakra*.

The importance of yanthras in the worship of *Ambāl* is greater than in the worship of any other deity. And among the

yanthras pertaining to the many aspects of *Ambāl* the *Śrīchakra* has a unique place.

Lines, and the circles, squares and triangles formed by the lines, all these are part of a chakra. A yantra has a central Bindu or dot. Designs or diagrams like this have the capacity to grasp the power of various deities and it is an immeasurable power. They are indeed divine designs. They repulse evil powers, attract divine ones.

In the middle portion of the *Śrīchakra*, in the chakra that is a circle, there are nine triangles and these cross one another forming 43 triangles in all. The central bindu or dot is also regarded as a triangle and it is customary to speak of 44 triangles in all. The 44 triangles have the form of six *avarana*s. The literal meaning of '*āvaraṇa*' is concealing (covering, obscuring). Here the word must be construed as a circle or as a row. If a number of people stand surrounding an individual will he not be hidden? '*Āvaraṇa*' is to be understood in the same sense. The central Bindu or dot, which we said was called a triangle, is also regarded as an *āvaraṇa*. The 43 triangles surrounding it constitute five *avarana*s. With the Bindu (and the five *avarana*s made by the 43 triangles) there are six *āvaraṇa*s. Many of you must be familiar with the term '*navavarana*'. Now Muthusvami Dikshitar's '*navāvaraṇa*' compositions have become very popular and the word '*navavarana*' is widely used especially since the compositions are broadcast by radio. *Navavarana* denotes the nine circles in the *Śrīchakra*. There are *Śāstrā*s dealing with who resides in each *āvaraṇa*, what truths each *āvaraṇa* conveys, who the presiding deities are of these *āvaraṇa*s, what blessings they give and what mudra belongs to each *āvaraṇa*. Dikshitar has dealt with the subject briefly in his *navavarana* compositions. I spoke about the six *āvaraṇa*s: the 44 triangles are contained in them. Outside these six are three more *āvaraṇa*s; so, altogether, there are nine----

navavarāṇas. Of the last three *āvarāṇas* two are circles with lotus petals. The eight *āvarāṇas* have an outer wall, so to speak, consisting of three compound walls. They are represented by three lines and they are not circles but squares. Altogether it is a design that has immeasurable divine power.

But great caution is called for with regard to this diagram. Every line and every triangle in the yantra must be precise in measurement. Just as a change in the sound of a mantra brings evil consequences, so too even a small error in the design of a yantra can lead to unhappy consequences. Even if the design is right, if the *Śrīyantra*'s central triangle points upwards instead of downwards, the result will be different from what we expect.

There is another aspect of *Śrīchakra* worship that requires much caution. When we perform puja with a yantra installed we must pay greater regard to ritual purity than when we do *pūjā* with idols. Also we must strictly adhere to what is laid down in the *Śāsthrās* with regard to yantra worship.

At present in many homes people conduct certain rites in the name of *Śrīchakra-pūjā*. They do so to satisfy their vanity or for the sake of fashion. Some of them may be ignorant about how the *pūjā* is to be conducted. However it be, the rules are not properly observed and the results are unhappy; famine, lack of peace, etc.

It is not enough to have the desire to perform a rite or a *pūjā*. For the real fruits to be reaped you must perform it according to the injunctions of the *Śāsthrās*, according to how our great men, our elders, have performed it. Much is said about the greatness of the *Śrīchakra* in the *Śāsthrās*. And the same texts mention how the *pūjā* is to be conducted. And if we ignore them, telling ourselves, 'I will do the *pūjā* as I like, according to my convenience,' the desired benefits will not be yielded and the consequences may be contrary to what is expected.

A yanthra is not only the place of residence of a deity; it is also a prathinidhi or a representative of the same. Even this is not correct, to say that a yanthra is a representative of a deity. It is no 'prathi', not a 'copy', but the deity in reality - in the form in which the yanthra is designed.

When *Ambāl* is the deity of *Srīvidhyā* there is something special about her presence in her yanthra form. That is why the *Srīyanthra* has a unique importance. In worshipping *Ambāl*, her yanthra form is regarded as being higher than even her supremely beautiful personal form.

I spoke of *Ambāl* having two places of residence, one in the ocean of ambrosia, the other on the Mēru mountain. The *Srīchakra* must be added to these as her third place of residence.

There are two mistakes in what I have just said. First, the *Srīchakra* is not merely *Ambāl*'s place of residence; it is *Ambāl* herself: the place of residence plus the one who resides in it. The second mistake is that the yanthra is not a place of residence like the ocean of ambrosia or the Mēru mountain. Whether it is the ocean of ambrosia or the Mēru mountain it has the yanthra also with the *Chinthāmani* palace housing it. The yanthra worshipped in our homes is no more than a span in size. But the ones in the ocean of ambrosia and the Mēru mountain are a thousand or ten thousand times bigger and each has nine *āvaraṇas*. In these nine there are many deities, *Ambāl*'s entourage, and attendants. On the Bindhu, the ninth *āvaraṇa*, *Ambāl* is seated on the *PanchaBrahmāsana*.

When *Ambāl* resides on the Mēru peak, each of the *āvaraṇas* rise above that peak forming peaks themselves. So the *Srīchakra* is made not only as a two-dimensional yanthra but with the third dimension representing height; it is built tier upon tier, in a conical form. The three dimensional *Srīchakra* is called 'Mēru-prasthāra' or simply 'Mēru. The two-dimensional yanthra, level to the earth,

is known as '*Bhū-prasthāra*'. One combining both features -- the initial *āvaraṇas* rising and the subsequent ones level to the earth --- is called '*Ardha-mēru*'. If all *āvaraṇas* are *Mēru-prasthāra*, the yanthra is called '*Purna-mēru*'. The chakra in *Kānchī Kāmakōshta* is *Bhu-prasthāra*. The one in our Mutt is *purna-meru*. In Maṅgadu [near Chennai] it is *Ardha-mēru*. In the sanctum of *Mūkāmbā* in Tiruvidaimarudur [in *Thanjavūr* district] it is *Pūrṇa-mēru*.

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YANTHRA, THANTHRA, CAPITAL CITY EACH WITHOUT A SEPARATE NAME

Devotees of *Ambāl* take pride in the fact that, while the yanthras of other deities are named after them (after the deities) - or after their distinguishing marks - *Śiva chakra*, *Medha-Dakshināmūrthi-yanthra*, *Shadākshara chakra* and so on - the yanthra of Lalitha-Thripurasundari alone has no special name or attributes. It is simply called '*Śrīchakra*', the prefix *Śrī* denoting that it is very sacred and worthy of worship and very auspicious. In fact the word '*chakra*' itself means the *Śrīchakra*, suggesting that *Ambāl*'s yanthra does not need to have a special name of its own.

Similar is the case with the *mārga* or way of *Ambāl*'s worship. It is called *Śrīvidhya*, suggesting that the word '*mārga*' itself means the *mārga* of her worship. The '*Śrī*' in *Śrīvidhyā* also means worthy of worship and does not denote Lakshmi, that is *Śrīdevī*. All ways of worship come under the general term '*vidhyā*' or '*thanthra*'. When we speak of other deities we call the way they are worshipped after their names, or after the seers who formulated that way of worship. But the *vidhya* of Thripurasundari does not have a name of its own: it is merely '*Śrīvidhya*'.

There are many different kinds of *Śrīvidhya* manthras. How can we then use the term *Śrīvidhya* manthra for all of them? So these different *Śrīvidhya* manthras are each called after its initial

letter or after the seer who originated it. But the common name for all *Lalithā* thanthras is *Śrīvidhya*.

It is not Thripurasundari thanthra and yanthra alone that have no special names, *Ambāl*'s capital city also has no special name. It is merely called - '*Śrīpura*' or '*Śrīnāgara*'. '*Pura*' or '*nagara*' means a place, any town or city. '*Śrīpura*', '*Śrīnagara*': these names are enough to proclaim that they denote the capital city of the World Mother.

Ambāl bestows on us '*nithyaśrī*', imperishable beatitude, the wealth - unsurpassed of the bliss of the *Āthmā*. That is why her very first name in the *Lalithā - Sahasranāmam* '*Śrīmāthā*'. In keeping with this, everything connected with her has similar names, '*Śrīvidhya*', '*Śrīchakra*', '*Śrīpura*'.

I was speaking about the *Śrīyantra* called *Śrīchakra* occurring in the *Saundaryalaharī* stanza. I mentioned that six of the nine triangles cut one another forming 44 triangles. Of the nine, four are called *Śiva* chakras and five *Śakthi* chakras. The central triangle surrounding the Bindu is one of the *Śakthi* chakras. While we do *pūjā* at home it must face the one who performs the *pūjā*.

The non-dualistic union of *Śiva* and *Śakthi* is shown by the crisscrossing chakras of the two. The triangles thus formed, the lotus petals in the outer circles, the circles and squares : their measurements are given in the hymn [Stanza 1].

The subject should not be of mere academic interest to you. Learning it should not be like reading a novel. It must be taught by a guru and preserved as a secret. I touched upon it briefly since I thought it should not be altogether omitted.

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THE INCOMPARABLE BEAUTY OF AMBĀL

After describing the yanthra, the Āchāryā felt the urge to portray the beauty of *Ambāl*, the glory of her physical form. 'Is it not *Saundaryalaharī* that I am composing?' he must have asked himself and he must have felt the urge to depict the supreme beauty of *Ambāl*'s physical form. So he commences the next stanza (12) with the words, 'Thvadhīyam saundaryam,' meaning 'your loveliness'. 'I have sung the greatness of your yanthra,' he seems to say addressing *Ambāl*, 'its angles, its circles, its petals, squares, in fact every detail of it. But is it so easy to sing the beauty of your form? Is it possible at all? No poet so far has been able to describe it truthfully.'

Brahma is the primordial poet. 'Ādhi kavayē,' these words occur in the very first stanza of the *Bhāgavatham* in referring to him. If Sarasvathi herself is his *Śakthi*, can there be a greater poet than he? We know from the *Purāṇās* that he has composed hymns to all deities. During times of distress the celestials go to him for help. At once he takes them to *Śiva*, *Vishṇu*, *Ambāl* or any other deity as the case may be and requests him or her to free them from their troubles. At the time he would sing the praises of the deity whose intervention he seeks, in the company of the celestials. When he himself is in trouble does he not have to do so? In this manner he has sung the praises of *Ambāl* also. You see in the *Durgā Sapthasathī* that, when the demons Madhu and Kaitabha were intent on tormenting him he extols her. But even he is not able to paint a true picture of her beauty.

Tvadhīyam saundaryam Thuhinagirikanyē thulayithum
Kavīndrāḥ Kalpanthe Kathamapi Virinchi-prabhruthayah

'Virinchi -prabhruthayah' means 'Brahma and others'. Brahma and others try to describe *Ambāl*'s beauty. 'Thulayithum' means to weigh something in the scales. 'Thula' is a balance. How

do we find out the weight of an object? By placing the object to be weighed on one pan of the balance and the weight on the other. We cannot determine the weight of anything directly. We have to weigh it against another object whose weight is known to us. Brahma and others are unable in this manner to find out how great *Ambāl's* beauty is. They seek a weighing stone known to them, an object with which *Ambāl's* beauty can be compared, an *upamāna*. The face like the moon, the eyes like lotuses, the hair like a swarm of bees : it is like weighing an object against a known weight. The poets, Brahma and others, are unable to find such weights, such objects with which *Ambāl's* beauty can be compared. The *Āchāryā* does not say this in so many words. He merely says, '*kathamapi kalpanthe*': the poets try to imagine *Ambāl's* beauty somehow. Brahma and other poets rack their brains to find something to which it can be likened. But they fail. *Ambāl's* beauty is incomparable. This is the beauty of poetry: conveying a meaning by not expressly stating it. It is 'dhvani' [literally 'Sound' but in rhetoric it means 'suggestion' or 'hint']. 'It is true that I rushed to see the *pradoṣha dipārādhana* [the worship with lamps at dusk]. 'It is not necessary to add anything to these words to convey the meaning that 'I could not see it' . Leaving something unsaid, by merely hinting at it, makes a deep impression on the mind.

'I spoke about the yantra, its design. I want to speak about *Ambāl's* beauty but I find that it is beyond description. If I try to give an idea of it by weighing it against objects of comparison I remember that even Brahma and others have failed in this'. By saying this the *Āchāryā* tells us how *Ambāl's* beauty has no match, that there is nothing to equal it, that it is so sublime.

Leave alone the question of whether a poet can describe *Ambāl's* beauty. He, the poet or poet-devotee, must himself see that beauty and must be fully aware of it. If you ask whether anyone has seen it (*Ambāl's* beauty) the answer is 'No' . If a poet

has. not seen *Ambāl* and her beauty how can he describe it to others?

Why is it that no one has seen *Ambāl*'s physical form? Not quite : we cannot say that no one has had even a glimpse of her. In fact many devotee-poets have had her *dharsān*. But she does not reveal herself fully: she shows herself only for a brief moment like a flash of lightning. Even those who have wholly dedicated themselves to her have not seen her fully. They see her sidelong glance, the parting of her lips in a gentle smile; in this way their eyes will retain the image of some part of her body and never do they have *dharsān* of her from head to foot.

Ambāl shows the beauty of her entire person only to one: her husband *Paramēśvarā*. She has assumed her supremely lovely form of *Thripurasundari* only because he must unite with her and become engaged in the sport of the world. She is a great *pathivrathā* and she has dedicated her body entirely to her husband. To others she may afford a glimpse of herself but will not reveal to them all her beauty. To her devotees she will show her compassion wholly. But when it comes to her beauty she has it as an asset belonging to her *Swāmī*, her Lord.

Does it mean then that the portrait of *Ambāl* painted by the *Āchāryā* in the latter section of the hymn does not represent her beauty fully? It may be so. A mother shows her child all her love but she may not reveal to it her beauty. If she adorns herself it is to please her husband, not her child. '*Alankāra*' means beautifying oneself. *Ambāl* has no need to beautify herself, make herself beautiful with adornments. She is naturally beautiful. She reveals her loveliness only to her husband. That being so how can others describe her as she is? First of all, they do not know the richness of her beauty that is complete in every respect. Nor can they describe her, extol her beauty even to the extent they know it because they cannot find the words for it. Such is the splendour of her beauty.

Also they cannot give an idea of it by resorting to comparisons because there is nothing in the world to compare with it.

The poet has indicated skilfully that *Ambāl* reveals her beauty fully to *Paramēśvarā* alone. How?

Yadhālōkauthsukyādhamaralalanā yānthi manasā
Thpōbhirdushprāpāmapi Girīśasāyujya-padhavīm

‘Amaralalana’ means celestial damsels: *Rambha*, *Urvasi*, *Mēnakā*, *Thiloththamā* and others such celestial damsels that we speak of as great beauties. But even they admit to themselves, after catching a mere glimpse of *Ambāl*’s beauty: ‘What is our beauty before hers? What we see is only a tiny fraction of her beauty. What would be her beauty like if it were revealed in full?’ The celestial damsels are eager to see *Ambāl*’s beauty revealed fully in all its splendour. Suppose a musician comes across another musician who sings better than he. Would he not be keen to find out in what respect his music is better? It is the same in all fields. The celestial damsels long to know *Thripurasundari*’s beauty fully. ‘*Yadhālōkauthsukyāth*’ - because of the keen desire to see that beauty. The ‘*yath*’ in the phrase refers to the first words in the stanza ‘*thvadhīyam saundaryam*’.

What do they do, the heavenly maidens who are so desirous of seeing the beauty of *Ambāl* fully? ‘What is the use of our longing?’ they tell themselves. ‘Since she (*Thripurasundari*) has offered her body to her husband, it is his possession; so he alone can behold its beauty, the richness of that beauty. So what we must do is to become one with *Īśvarā*, attain *Śīva-sāyujya* (union with *Śīva*). Then we too will be able to see *Ambāl*’s loveliness fully.’

Devotees as well as *jñānis* have prayed for *Śīva-sāyujya* (union with *Śīva*), the former out of their devotion and the latter wanting to become *Śīvam* in their intensity of *jñāna*. They have

made great efforts for the same. For them *Śiva-sayujyam* is an end in itself. But for the celestial damsels it is not so. For them it is a means to behold *Ambālī's* beauty: that is the goal before their becoming one with *Śiva*.

But do Rambha and Mēnakā obtain oneness with *Śiva* by merely longing for the same? Is it (*Śiva-sāyujyam*) obtained easily? '*Thapōbhirdhushprāpāmapi*,' says the *Āchāryā*. It is not obtained by the most difficult ascetic endeavour. Celestial damsels are known to disturb those engaged in austerities. Can they control their senses, eradicate all their sensual urges? What do they do then?

We may imagine ourselves to be anything or anybody. We can build castles in the air. Thus *Rambha*, *Mēnaka* and others imagine themselves to be *Paramasiva*. '*Yānthi manasā Girīśasāyujya padavīm*' they attain the state of union with *Śiva* mentally.

In truth it is not a state that can be reached mentally. '*Yam manasā na manuthē*' - that which cannot be conceived of mentally. So if it is said that they (the celestial damsels) achieve union with *Śiva* mentally it means, 'in spite of intending to achieve such union they remain without succeeding in it'. That is they are unable to know *Ambālī's* beauty completely.

In the first half of the stanza it is said that Brahma and other poets try to find a suitable comparison for *Ambālī's* beauty and that they visualise many likenesses. The inner meaning of this is that they fail to find a true comparison. In the latter half of the stanza Rambha and Mēnaka are said to try to obtain union with *Śiva*, a state that is not reached even by performing severe austerities. Does it not also mean that they do not succeed? The *Āchāryā*, in his kindness, does not have the heart to say that '*Virinchi-prabhruthavah*' (Brahma and others) and '*amaralalana*' (the celestial damsels) fail in their efforts. This stanza in the

‘*Ānandalahari*’ section of the *Saundaryalaharī* raises *Ambālī*’s beauty (*saundarya*) to great heights.

* * *

EMBODIMENT OF TIME

In one stanza (14) *Ambālī* is depicted as the embodiment of Time. ‘*Kshithau shatpanchāshadh-dhvisamadhika-Panchāsadhu-dhakē.*’ There are six seasons in a year and 360 days in all’. These 360 days are the 360 rays emanating from the light of the Kundalini power, so it is mentioned in this stanza. Also each chakra stands for a rithu or season and it has as many rays as the number of days constituting the season. ‘*Kshithau shatpanchashadh*’: in the chakra representing the earth, that is in *mūlādharā*, there are 56 rays. Which means *Ambālī* is in this chakra as the 56-day-long season of spring. Thus the number of days for each chakra and the season corresponding to it are mentioned in this stanza.

As *Ambālī* compresses herself into Time as the different seasons she remains the personification of Time. But in truth she is beyond Time. (in the state in which she is beyond Time she resides in the *sahasradala padma* (the lotus of one thousand petals), higher than the six chakras, and her lotus feet shine as the feet of the Guru. The *Āchāryā* mentions this: ‘*Mayūkhāsthēshāmapyuparī thava pādāmbujayugam.*’ ‘*Mayukha*’ means a ray, day in the form of a ray. *Ambālī* is above the 360 days : ‘*Thesham api uparī*’, that is in the *sahasrāra* lotus. ‘*Thava pādāmbuja yugam*’ - ‘your two lotus feet’.

* * *

BESTOWING THE GIFT OF ELOQUENCE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND IN THE ŚĀKTHĀ SYSTEM

In the ‘*Ānandalahari*’ section of the hymn there are some stanzas which speak of *Ambālī* bestowing her grace not in her

aspect of *Lalithā* but in the aspects of other goddesses who are connected with the *Śrīvidhya thanthra*. I will deal with one such stanza (15).

Śarajjyōthsṇā-sūddhām saśiyutha jatājūta-makutām
Vara-thrāsa-thrāṇa-sphatikaghutikā-pusthaka-karām
Sakrunna thvā nathvā kathamiva sathām sannidhadhathe
Madhu-kshīra-draksha-madhurimadhurīṇāh phanithayah

Ambāl is conceived of here as a form of Vāgdevi without the *vīṇā*. Vāgdevi means Sarasvathi.

Many do not seem to know that just as *Ambāl* is the sister of *Vishṇu*, Lakshmi is the sister of Brahma and Sarasvathi the sister of *Paramaśiva*. Brother and sister must resemble each other, must share the same outlook and perform similar functions. Like *Paramaśiva*, Sarasvathi is white-complexioned. '*Sarajjyōthsṇā-sūddhām*': radiant like the autumnal moon and white in colour. It is during autumn that we perform puja to Sarasvathi. She is in fact named '*Śāradā*' after the season of *śaradh* or autumn.

The *Āchāryā* is specially fond of the name of *Śāradā*. Sarasvathi is important to him, he who scaled the heights of learning and composed commentaries, hymns, and held disputations with the learned. Among the many names of Sarasvathi he is specially attached to that of *Śāradā*. It may be because of the purity suggested by the name, by the whiteness and the pleasant coolness that it invokes. '*Śa*' and '*Sa*' are often interchanged. Thus *Śāradā* becomes *Sāradā*. In the North there is the practice of *Śāradā* being called *Sāradā*. '*Śāra-dā*' means one who grants a blessing that has much substance, or much meaning. *Jñāna* indeed is *Sāra-thathva*. This may be another reason for the *Āchāryā* liking the name of *Śāradā*. In *Śrūṅgeri Ambāl* is installed in the form of *Śāradā*. The *Pītā* of *Śrūṅgeri* is also named after *Śāradā*, *Śāradā Pītā*. The mutt in *Dwārakā* is called *Śāradā Pītā*.

Our Mutt (Kārichī) too is known by that name - *Kāmakoti Pītā*, *Śāradā Mutt*. Even though the *Āchāryā* is specially fond of the name of *Śāradā* it does not occur anywhere in the hymn and likewise names such as *Lalithāmbāl* and *Thripurasundari* are also not seen used. But by the very first word of the stanza (15), '*Sarajjyōthsna*', he reminds us of *Śāradā*.

The goddess in her form here is pure white like *Īsvarā*. Like him she wears a crown of matted hair. Besides, she has in it, as is the case with him, the crescent-moon. Herself white like moonlight, she becomes further radiant with the crescent-moon in her matted hair : '*Śasiyulajatājūta-makutām*.'

She has four, hands. Two of them show the vara and abhaya gestures, '*varathrāsathrāṇa*'. Instead of 'abhaya', the term used here is 'thrāsathrāṇa' alliteratively. *Thrāsa* is fear and *thrāṇa* protecting: protecting one from fear is abhaya.

The *Āchāryā* had said earlier: 'But for you all deities have the abhaya and vara gestures'. That is why in depicting a form other than *Lalithāmbāl*, that is a deity connected with Sarasvathi, he shows her with the hand gestures of conferring boons and granting freedom from fear (*varābhaya hasthas*) and not with the *vīṇā* and the parrot in her hands.

Then the *Āchāryā* mentions the *akshamālā* or rosary and the book which are distinctive to Sarasvathi. There must be an amendment to this, 'distinctive to Sarasvathi'. Sarasvathi's brother, in his aspect of *Dakṣiṇāmūrti*, also bears the two (rosary and book) in his hands. '*Sphatika-ghutikā-pusthaka-karām*'. '*Sphatika-ghutikā*' means *akshamāla*: *akshamāla* is indeed '*aksharamāla*' - (a string of letters). From 'a' to 'ksa' there are 51 letters and for each letter there is a bead, all the letters (that is all the beads) together making an *akshamāla*.

I must speak here about a subject of the utmost importance to the *Śāktha* system; indeed it is its life-blood. I am referring to

the importance given to letters in it or to sound which is the basis of all letters. We have seen that creation is caused by vibrations. The vibrations exist in space in the subtle form of sounds and from them originate creation, manthras and the *Vedhas* that are repletewith manthras. I said that sound is the *thanmāthra* which is the subtle power of space. The sport of creation and 'creation becoming absorbed in the Root (all that is created returning to its original source): these processes represent evolution and involution and constitute the backbone of the *Śāktha* system. So the concept of sound which runs through it may be called its life-blood (or its vital breath). On the one hand, there is in the *Śāktha* system the cosmos of artha or the cosmos of vasthu and in it is mentioned the five principles of *Śiva*, *Śākthi*, *Sadāśivā*, *Īśvarā* and *Śuddha Vidhya* - from the *Parabrahmam* down to the creation of the gross material world. On the other hand, there is the cosmos of sound which has five categories beginning with '*parā*'. After *parā* we have '*paśyanti*' and '*madhyamā*'. The *parā* sound can neither be vocalised by man nor is it audible to him. This extremely subtle sound in its slightly gross form is '*paśyanthi*'. *Parā* is sound that is absolute; it is sound in the fundamental sense. When that utterly subtle sound becomes a little gross it is called '*paśyanthi*'. '*Paśyanthi*' means 'sees', 'views'. Subsequent to this is the sound produced by itself, without human effort, and it is called *mdhyamā*'. It is in between the subtle sound and the sound produced vocally by man that is why (in the intermediate stage) it is called *madhyamā*'; sound that occurs on its own is known as '*anāhata sabda*'. means 'unstruck sound' . '*Āhata*' = struck; '*anāhata*' = unstruck.

The question arises: 'Is the sound produced by our speech the result of striking an object?' Yes, it is. The sound we produce when we speak, the sound produced by musical instruments, all sound that we hear with our ears are produced by striking (some

object or other). The sounds of our speech and our songs are created by air striking our throat in different ways and the tongue striking the teeth and palate. The harmonium, the violin, the flute, the *nāgasvaram*, all these instruments produce their sound as air strikes them. When you play the flute, you close its holes with your fingers and then release them : this also can be said to be striking. Plucking the strings of the *vīṇā* is equivalent to striking them. All this is like administering a loving stroke. Bowing the violin is also a kind of striking, striking its strings. As for the *mrudangam*, *ghatam*, *kanjira* and so on, they are really struck or beaten hard to produce their sounds. Some percussion instruments need to be struck or beaten with sticks. The instrument called the *jāṭra* (castanets) has two halves: to play it you strike one half with the other. All this belongs to the *ahata* category. *Anāhata* sound arises by itself, unstruck: it is *madhyamā*. '*Vaikhāri*' comes after *parā*, *paśyanthi* and *madhyamā*. It is sound in the gross form that is produced by us with our mouth (vocal cords) and it involves some effort on our part. In this fourth category of sound there are two types: 'dhvani' which is mere (or inarticulate) sound and sound that is articulate and called 'varna'. This is the fifth category of sound. *Varna* means letter. There are 51 letters that constitute articulate speech.

A child produces all sorts of inarticulate sounds. It is babble and it is not made up of distinct syllables. These mere sounds come under the category of *dhvani*. Even grown-ups produce mere *dhvani* when they cry or laugh.

From *parā* to the two type of *vaikhāri* sound there are five *thathvas* of sound. These are equivalent to the five *thathvas* in the cosmos of matter. It can be said that the five sound *thathvas* are more important than the five concepts of the *artha-prapancha*, since all objects of the material cosmos are created by the vibrations of sound.

What do we call the gross objects of the gross world? 'Padhārthas'. 'Padhārtha' literally denotes what is meant by speech, by words. Padha, a speech, word, belongs to the sabda-prapancha, the verbal cosmos, the world of sound. What emerges in the gross form from it is 'artha'. What is called 'arthaprapancha' is the artha or meaning inhering in speech or sound.

Among the various wonders performed by *Ambāl* with her *Māyā*: in the Kundalini chakras *Ambāl* in her different forms of sound resides in an order that is the reverse of how she resides in them as the five elements. In the base chakra called *mūlādhāra* she is in the extremely gross form of earth. Then as she rises she becomes more and more subtle, assuming the forms of water, fire, wind; and in the *visuddhi chakra*, that is in the pit of the bosom, as *ākāśa* or space. But in the *sabda-prapancha*, her ascent in the chakras is from the subtle to the gross: she is the para of space in the *mūlādhāra*, and in the pit of the bosom she is the gross *vaikhari*.

The gross sound outwardly manifested as speech is not to be regarded as belonging to any inferior category. The 51 letters representing articulate speech are called *mātrūkās*. 'Mātrūkā' means mother. When she is a lady of great prestige, when *Ambāl* is a queen, she is Mother. But when she mixes with us in affection, as one among us, she is *mātrūkā*, the little mother.

The supreme queen-*Mahārājni* -- as the personification of the 51 varnas is called 'Mātrūkāvarṇasvarūpini' in the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*. The word 'Sarvavarṇātmikē' occurs in *Kālīdāsā's Śyāmalāḍandakam*.

The *sabda-prapancha* is of great importance to the *Śāktha* thanthra. The akshamāla (rosary) and book are symbols of it. The former consists of 51 beads representing the same number of *mātrūkās*.

The *Śrīvidhya* manthras are not in the form of the names of *Ambāl*; they are what are called 'bījāksharas', pure letters or syllables ('seed letters'). It means the Supreme Goddess takes the form of such sounds. If these *bījāksaras* are constantly muttered with one-pointed devotion *Ambāl* will appear in the form of sound and give her blessings. And these blessings will indeed be great. The muttering of these seed letters is capable of giving the devotee the same blessings as the practice of *Kuṇḍalini yōga* and he will be helped to come face to face with *Ambāl*. That apart, *Ambāl* will grant us all our prayers, all that we desire, if we keep muttering these manthras or *bījāksharas*, basic letters, which are her form as sound. We will even be able to have *dharṣan* of her physical form: we will be able to behold her form from the hair on her head to her feet (*keśādhi-pādāntam*). Thus her sport is such that it will accomplish for us all that we need here and hereafter.

So far we have been speaking about letters alone. What we speak, what we write, all that is made up of letters : poetry, hymns, Sasthras, everything beginning with the *Vēdhas*.

There are three divisions called 'Kūtās' in *Śrīvidhya* manthras. The first of the three is called *vāgbhava*, originating from 'vāk'. A manthra in its entirety is *Ambāl* herself. Of it the face is '*vāgbhava kūṭā*': after all one speaks with the mouth which is part of the face. It is given immense importance, and it is said again and again in the *Śāktha* texts that *Ambāl* will bless her devotees with special powers of expression, make them poets. This is mentioned repeatedly in the *Saundaryalaharī* itself. Why are *vāgbhava-kūṭa manthras* so important?

Parāśakthi has blessed the human race with the power of speech and no other species has it. The fact that it is a special gift to us shows its importance. If we have right knowledge we will realise that the purpose of this gift is to take us to the most exalted state (*srēyas*) and we will use it (the gift of speech) to serve that purpose.

Our ultimate goal must be to attain her by using speech for a divine purpose [for matters connected with her].

Where does lie the greatness of speech? It is not enough for a man to have experience of a sublime nature: he must raise himself and enable others too to have the same experience. It is through speech that this great service is accomplished. Why does *Ambāl* bestow on an individual the power of speech and the genius of poesy? One child of hers must call all other children; it must call again and again all other children to share its divine experience with them, share its divine visions of beauty and also share its noble thoughts. What more meritorious act can there be than this? That is why speech is extolled again and again as a special gift.

When a guru lays down a way of *sāadhanā* for a discipline meant to achieve a high goal, he imposes certain harsh restrictions. The poet makes the goal of that *sāadhanā* attainable to all, and attainable easily, happily and delightfully, through his poems, through his songs. So the benefits of *Ambāl*'s blessings conferred on one individual are not monopolised by him but become the property of all as in a socialist order. This is what *Ambāl* does with the gift of speech. That is why it is extolled again and again.

What *Lalithāmbikā* accomplishes herself is mentioned in this verse as something done by her special form called *Vāgdevī*.

Good people, virtuous people, have to prostrate themselves only once before *Vāgdevī* who has hands held in the gestures of granting boons and freedom from fear and also hands that bear the rosary and the book. '*Sathām*' means for 'good people'. '*Sakrunnatvā*' : 'sakruth' in this phrase means 'once'; 'nathva' means 'by prostrating themselves'. It is enough for them, good people, to prostrate themselves once before the goddess. Who need to prostrate themselves only once? The question is important. It is not mentioned here that 'anybody' by prostrating

himself before the goddess will receive the gift of poesy. Noble people, people of exemplary conduct, they alone need to prostrate themselves before her only once. '*Madhu kshīra-drākshā-madhurima-dhurīṇa phāṇīthayah*': the words apply to them: The *Āchāryā* mentions three things noted for their sweetness: honey, milk, grapes. They are not only sweet, they can be taken in easily and are digested easily. Also, they are extremely nourishing. There is nothing to equal them in these respects. It is to these that the *Āchāryā* likens the words of the wise taken in by a man, words that become inwardly digested and strengthen him in his ultimate quest. By prostrating themselves only once before her, Vāgdēvi bestows on them the poetic genius of raining words that are as sweet as honey, milk and grapes.

Instead of stating that virtuous people will be blessed with such powers of speech, instead of stating it as a fact, the *Āchāryā* asks with the art of a poet: 'How will it not create such powers of speech?': '*Kathamiva na sannidadhatē?*'

In this stanza the *Āchāryā* indulges in word play. He uses 'nathva' twice in the phrase '*sakrunnathva nathva*'. Such use of words belongs to the figure of speech called '*śabdālankara*'. The second 'nathva' means 'prostrating' (themselves). This is a word by itself. 'Sakrunnatva' is split thus: 'sakruth', 'na' and 'thva': here 'na' + 'thva' = 'natva'. 'Na' indicates a negative sense. When the *Āchāryā* asks, 'Will there not be the power of speech?', he adds 'na' to 'sannidadhate' to get that meaning. In ordinary speech it must be 'na sannidadhathe'. But here the *Āchāryā* uses the 'na' earlier in 'sakrunna'. He thus indulges in verbal play.

Kavīndhrāṇam chētaḥ kamalavanabālātaparuchim
Bhajanthē yē santah kathichidarunāmēva bhavathīm
Virinchiprēyasyāstharuṇa thara-Srungāra lahariī
Gabhīrābhir vāgbhir vidhadhathi sathām ranjanamami

After mentioning Vāgdevi who is white-complexioned and *sāthhvik* in nature, the *Āchāryā* speaks in this stanza (16) of the goddess in her rajasik aspect in which she is a deep red in colour. Before sunrise the eastern sky is red and we call it '*aruṇodaya*', the rise of *Aruṇa*, '*aruṇa*' meaning red. The charioteer of the Sun God is red-complexioned and he is called *Aruṇa*. It is he who is seen first since he sits in front of the chariot and his appearance means *aruṇodaya*. Then we see the Sun God who is seated in the centre of the chariot and his appearance is called *suryodaya*. Here the *Āchāryā* speaks about another form of Sarasvathi who is red in colour. Those who meditate on this Sarasvathi are blessed with the gift of erotic poetry. *Srungāra*, love or the erotic rasa, is associated with *rajōguṇa*. Since it is customarily represented by red it is appropriate that *Arunāmbāl* (the red Sarasvathi) should give her devotees such a blessing.

But love or *Srungāra* in this context is not to be understood in its common or vulgar form but in the sense in which the husband-and-wife relationship of *Kāmēśvara* and *Kāmēśvarī* is understood, the inner meaning of the same. Those who can appreciate the true meaning behind it and take delight in it are men of good nature. In the previous stanza it was said that by making obeisance only once to the white complexioned Sarasvathi such men acquired the gift of poesy. The poetry they compose, the songs they sing, must also be 'white', that is they must be *Sāthhvik*, and teach people passionless detachment and *jñāna*. There is a state of spiritual perfection in which one takes delight in *jñāna* and detachment in an erotic manner. This is possible for *sādhus*, virtuous and mature people. So devotees of the red Sarasvathi sing in such a manner as to delight them. In the previous stanza the *Āchāryā* spoke that *sādhus* would obtain the gift for words sweet like honey, milk and grapes. In this stanza, he says that devotion to the red Sarasvathi creates joy for the same *sādhus* through their

devotional poems. The poets referred to in the previous stanza are in this stanza *rasikas*, connoisseurs.

But who are the poets here? They are *sādhū-srēṣhtas*, the best among *sādhū*s, those who have gone to levels higher than other *sādhū*s. Those who receive the gift of poesy from the white Sarasvathi are *sādhū*s in general. Among them who are the ones who compose poetry with the sentiment of love? 'Kathichidh santāh', a few (*sādhū*s), some. This means that even among *sādhū*s only a few must have reached the state of 'nāyikā bhāva', those who look upon themselves as the brides of the deity. Only a few utterly mature *sādhū*s can compose poetry permeated with the mood of love containing truths that lead you to the Ultimate. And only the rest of the *sādhū*s can listen to it and appreciate it in the right spirit and take delight in it. The *Āchāryā* uses the word 'ranjanam' to denote the delight taken by *sādhū*s in such poetry. There is a pun in the word. The syllable 'ra' denotes red. Agni (fire) is red: hence the word 'kā māgni', the 'fire of love' or 'desire' is 'ra'. 'Ram' + 'janam' = that which creates red. It is the state of mellowness, a redness akin to that of embers. A fully ripe fruit will be red. The delight caused by mental redness (mellowness) is 'ranjanam'. Poets who are utterly mature compose poems through the grace of the red Sarasvathi, poems that cause other *sādhū*s happiness that is mellow. If this Sarasvathi is 'Aruṇ' (Red), the poets here generate 'ram' (redness): they compose poems that create waves of the sentiment of love, a flow of the erotic mood. Such poetry the *Āchāryā* describes as 'gabhirābhih vāgbhih', that is words of depth, words of profundity, words of a deep significance. Superficially seen, this poetry is a wave of *Srungāra* but if one dives deep into it one will discover pearls and corals of wisdom.

Kāmēsvarī herself has the name of *Aruṇa*. Her *dhyāna-slōka* has this '*Aruṇām karuṇā-tharangithāksim*'. According to wise men

the goddess mentioned by the *Āchāryā* here is *Arunā Sarasvathi* with eight hands: she has the four hands of *Kāmēsvarī* bearing the bow, arrows, noose and goad and the four hands of *Sarasvathi* of which two bear the rosary and the book and the other two show the gestures of granting boons and freedom from fear.

In the next stanza (17) the *Āchāryā* speaks of the immense benefits of learning that will be obtained by meditating on *Lalithā-Thripurasundari* surrounded by *Vāgdēvatās* (the deities of speech).

‘*Vāgdēvi*’ in the singular denotes *Sarasvathi* alone. *Vāgdēvatās* - in the plural--denote eight of them. The sixteen vowels beginning with ‘a’ have one *Vāgdēvatā*. *Ka-varga* (*ka, kha, ga, gha, ṇa*) has another *Vāgdēvatā*. Similarly *cha* varga (*ca, cha, ja, jha, ṇa*), *ṭa-varga* (*ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha, ṇa*), *pa* varga (*pa, pha, ba, bha, ma*), have each another. So the 51 letters have together eight *Vāgdēvatās*. The *Vāgdēvatā* of the vowel group is called ‘*Viṣini*’. The eight devatas are together called ‘*Viṣinydhi devatās*’. It is they, bidden by *Ambāl*, who sing the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*. The eight *Vāgdēvatās* occupy the eight angles of the seventh *āvaraṇa* of the *Śrīchakra*, thus surrounding *Ambāl*.

Since they are the mothers who give birth to words [to speech] the *Āchāryā* begins the stanza with the words. ‘*Savitribhih vāchām*’. There is a kind of crystal which is believed to melt with the impact of moonlight on it. It is called *Chandrakanta* (moonstone), so it is mentioned in the books. The *Vāgdēvatās* are like moonstone reflecting moonlight within them. In one stanza (15) the *Āchāryā* says, ‘*Śarajjyōthsnā suddhām*’, in another (16) ‘*Arunām*’. Here (17) he says that *Ambāl* who is *Arunā* is surrounded by *Vāgdēvatās* who are radiant like moonlight. He who meditates on *Ambāl* the queen, ‘*sanchinthayathi yah*’, keeping in mind her companions, the *Vāgdēvatās*, will be blessed with the gift of composing great poetic works. His words will have the *rasa* of the flow of speech of great men. ‘*Mahatām bhangiruchi*’. ‘*Ruchi*’

means taste: in any language the word used for savouring food is also used for literary appreciation.

Why should only the taste known by the tongue be mentioned? So the *Āchāryā* adds the smell known by the nose. Just as words taste sweet like honey, milk and grapes, what kind of fragrance do they have? The divine fragrance emanating from the face of Sarasvathi who is all the eight *Vāgdēvatās* combined. The words of a great poet will have the fragrance comparable to this, fragrance that will arouse the urge of sweet love. Thus the *Āchāryā* has composed the stanza. '*Vachōbhih Vāgdēvai vadana kamalamōdha-madhuraih*'. Sarasvathi is the embodiment of purity and all Sathhvik qualities and she is also the fountain of all arts. When such a goddess opens her mouth the very air we breathe will be redolent of her fragrance. Even without wearing flowers in it, *Ambāl*'s hair will spread perfume - I will come to that subject later. Similarly, without taking cardamoms and mace, *Vāgdēvai*'s mouth will spread a pleasant smell. The words of a great poet will exude the same smell-and whoever recites his verses, his mouth too will be imparted the same pleasing smell: we may take it that the stanza conveys such a meaning. Since the fragrance naturally present in Sarasvathi's mouth is imparted to the poet's composition, the mouth of the one who rechithes it will also have the same pleasing smell.

That *Ambāl* blesses one with the power of literary expression is stated in a number of stanzas in the '*Saundaryalahari*' section. In one stanza (75) it is mentioned that her breast milk bestows the gift of boundless poesy. In another stanza (99) it is said that *Ambāl* will enable her devotee to earn the sidelong glance of Sarasvathi (that is he will receive the blessings of Sarasvathi) and Brahma himself will envy him his literary genius. In another verse (98) the *Āchāryā* observes that the sacred water of *Ambāl*'s feet makes even a dumb man burst into eloquent poetry. That *Ambāl* blesses her devotees with the gift of poesy and learning is

frequently stated. The *Āchāryā* who has seen the divine beauty of *Ambāl* shares his experience with others through his descriptions in the hymn and finds unsurpassed bliss in doing so. He must also be deriving great satisfaction in doing good to others in this way. Why does he mention again and again that the devotee of *Ambāl* will receive the gift of literary expression? He hopes that those who read his hymn will become her devotees, acquire the gift for words through her grace, compose hymns themselves and thus do good to others.

* * *

CURING ILLNESS

Ambāl's companions, the *Vāgdēvatās*, are described in Stanza 17 as possessing the colour of the moonstone. The *Āchāryā* calls the stone '*sasimanisilā*'. In a subsequent stanza [20, reproduced below] he speaks about how *Ambāl* herself is meditated upon as possessing the colour of that stone. The word he uses here is '*himagirisilā*' instead of '*Śāsa*'. '*Śāsa*' means a rabbit. There is a dark spot on the moon which resembles a rabbit; that is why the moon is called '*sasi*'. It is customary to say that ambrosia and dew trickle down from the moon. He is also called '*Sudhākara*' because, it is believed, he produces nectar. Since he is, besides, said to make snow he is known as '*Himakara*'. By speaking of '*Himakarasilā*', the *Āchāryā* refers to the place where *Ambāl*, *Himagirisutā*, resides. He also refers to the nectar or ambrosia flowing from *Ambāl*'s glance. The point to note is that, while he says that it is *Ambāl* who creates the flow of ambrosia, he mentions, at the same time, that the devotee too by his glance does the same thing, that he creates a flow of ambrosia.

Kirantīm angēbhyah kiranā-nikurumbāmrutharasam
Hrudi tvāmādatthē himakarasilā-mūrthimiva yah
Sa sarpāṇām darpam samāyāti sakunthādhīpa iva
Jvaraplushtān drushtyā sukhayati sudhādhārasirayā

The remarkable thing about this stanza is that it deals with freedom from illness. People undergo great suffering from many types of disease. Half or three-fourths of those who come to see the likes of me pray for relief from this or that ailment. So I know how people suffer and the different kinds of diseases that afflict them. The *Āchāryā* must have known better. Not only must he have known better about the ailments from which people suffered, he had the capacity to cure them also. In his compassion he desired that generations of people born after him must also be helped to find remedies for their ailments.

He thought to himself, 'It cannot be said that all of them are likely to regard me as a god. Even those who will regard me as an *avatārā* will think of me only as an incarnation of *jnāna* ('*jnānāvatāra*'). 'We can pray to him for *jnāna*, for detachment. It will not be proper if we pray to him for relief from bodily afflictions', they may think in this manner.'

When we see a great person face to face, in flesh and blood, we recognise his many and varied qualities. We will know him not only as great individual and as a *jnāna*, but as a parent, as a healer, as one who provides employment and arranges for our marriage. We see him in manifold roles and we can receive his blessings in answer to all our prayers. But once a *jnāna* has shed his mortal coils we believe that we can remember him only as one who brings us enlightenment, *jnāni*. People pray to a 'siddha', even after he is no more, for relief from bodily ills and for other gains. The idea is fixed in our minds that the *Āchāryā* is a *jnāni* and nothing but a *jnāni*. This must be the reason why to help future generations, the *Āchāryā* resolved to compose hymns to various deities, by reciting which people would be freed from all their afflictions. His *Subrahmaṇya-Bhujangam* is one such devotional poem. In this hymn *Saundaryalaharī* also he has included verses by reciting which the sick will be freed from the diseases afflicting them.

I remember mentioning it before: the *Saundaryalaharī* is entirely manthra *Śāsthṛā*. Each stanza of it must be thought of as a manthra and recited or muttered repeatedly and each will bring a particular benefit, a particular blessing. There are verses with a mantrik base in the hymn which, if recited, will earn you the sidelong glance of Sarasvathi and Lakshmi (that is bring you their grace). There are verses meant particularly to obtain proficiency in music; for the birth of a son; the return in good health of a man who has been away in a distant place and of whose whereabouts nothing is known; '*para-kāya-praveśa*' or entering the body of another; warding off ghosts and evil spirits; removal of the malefic effects of planets. There are also stanza in the hymn for many other such purposes. Above all, there are manthras in stanzaic form that take you so far as to be within reach of *jnāna* and liberation. If we read the hymn without desiring anything we will come face to face with the manifestation of *Ambālī* either in the *Sagurā* form or as *Nirgurā*. Whatever *Ambālī* has made an individual inwardly, whether he is a devotee or one seeking *jnāni*, she will manifest herself to him in accordance with it -- as *Sagurā* to the devotee and as *Nirgurā* to the *jnāna*. Even if a man reads the hymn with the intention of earning a reward his desire will be fulfilled. As mentioned earlier each stanza will bring him a particular benefit. The first and last stanzas will fulfil all his desires; they are '*sarvasiddhi-pradam*'.

If you look at the meaning of some of the stanzas you will be able to guess the benefits arising from reciting them. I say 'you will be able to guess' because in these verses the fruits yielded from reciting them are not expressly stated. So we have to infer them from the meaning of ślokas. The stanzas which expressly state such benefits are very few indeed. We saw that in the verses dealing with the white Sarasvathi, with the red Sarasvathi and with *Ambālī* surrounded by the *Vāgdēvatās* the benefit yielded by reciting them, the gift of poesy, is clearly mentioned The present

śloka also ('*Kiranthīm angēbhyah*') speaks of the relief to be obtained by reciting it. But even here, one must note, it is merely stated that 'if you worship a deity of such and such a form you will derive such and such a benefit'. The verse does not say that '*If you recite this śloka* you will receive such and such a reward'. It is great men who were able to divine the inner mind of the *Āchāryā* - his direct disciples or his followers who came after him - that discovered and made known how the repeated recitation of a particular stanza would have the effect of worshipping the deity mentioned in it. They have also told us in detail what yantra is to be drawn or installed for a particular stanza, the number of days during which the stanza is to be recited, and the number of times each day. Noted by them, besides, are the fruits that will be gained by such worship.

As seen before, from the meaning of the verses we can guess the blessings conferred by reciting them. One stanza (66) says that Sarasvathi is overcome by shame as she hears the voice of *Ambāl*. So sweet is it that she stops playing the *vīṇā*. *Ambāl*'s neck has three creases representing the three '*grāmas*' in music and they are boundaries meant to prevent a mix up of *rāgās* (Stanza 69). If these two stanzas are recited as mantras, we may take it that the reward will be proficiency in music. Even after consuming amrutha the celestials perish in the great deluge; but *Paramēśvarā* alone does not because, though he has swallowed poison there is the glory of *Ambāl*'s *thātanka* (ear-ornament) to save him, so says another verse (28). We may infer from this that by reciting this stanza we will be cured of poison and that we will be vouchsafed long life. But most of the *ślokas* are such that we cannot guess the benefits they will bring us. In the six chakras of the body *Ambāl* is present as the five elements and as manas, mind (Stanza 35) It is believed that by reciting this stanza one afflicted with consumption is cured. But there is no clue in the verse itself to suggest this.

There are many stanzas in the hymn like this. This is what is called '*manthrārtha*', that is the result or benefit yielded by the power of the sound, the sound of the manthra. The meaning of certain words [in a manthra or a poem] is one thing but the result produced by their sound is quite another, with no connection with it [with the meaning]. Sugar is powdered to make a number of objects like little boxes, dolls. We can make even things looking like chillies with it. But these chillies are sweet because the substance out of which they are made is sweet. The substance called sound, or the potency of a manthra, is one thing and the 'doll made of the verse' is another.

We also see that in some cases the same śloka gives benefits that are different from one another. Take the stanza beginning with the words '*Sruthinām murdhāno*' (84). It is to be recited by one wanting to enter the body of another ('para-kāyā-pravēśā'). But it is also indicated as a means of obtaining liberation. The two results produced by the verse are so different and a question with arise whether it is right. But the question will not arise if we realise that we must attach a value to the outlook, needs and faith of the devotee reciting the stanza. Depending upon the requirements and the desire of the devotee, the same stanza will yield different benefits. Honey induces sleep in one suffering from sleeplessness; but at the same time, it keeps a man, who is always sleepy awake and alert. Thus these manthras which are in the form of verses will bring results according to what a devotee prays for. Take, for example the stanza (63) which is recited as a means to attain union of -the individual Self with the Brahman. This śloka has it that in the sweetness, in the magic, of the gentle smile of *Ambālī* the nectar rained by moonlight turns sour: it begins with the words, '*Smitajyotsnājālam*'. It is mentioned that if you recite this verse even without having in mind a sublime idea like that of becoming one with the Brahman] you will derive the benefit of attracting people to yourself. Another stanza (73) says that it was by sucking

at the breast of *Ambāl* that Ganapati and *Subrahmaṇya* are able remain eternal brahmacharis, If seekers of *jnāna* recite it repeatedly they will not only be rewarded with the strength to remain brahmacharis, will also receive the ultimate, blessing of liberation. It is also said mothers with babies in arms will have plenty of breast milk if they keep reading this *śloka* with devotion (mothers who find it hard otherwise to breast-feed their children).

[The Gurudeva points to the garland of limes he is wearing and says..] Take one of these limes. It has four or five uses. It is because it has the power to attract divine forces that we string a number of limes together to make a garland for *Ambāl*. During *Vyāsā pūjā* we worship every one included in the lineage of our gurus. Each guru is invoked in a fruit. Limes have the power to transmit our good intentions to another, to remove from him the effects of evil eye, and to bring him every kind of good fortune. That is why when we go to see an important man we take with us a lime to give him. The fruit is sour to taste and yet we take it. We relish rice mixed with the juice of lime and lime pickle. While the fruit controls bile it can also be a palliative in cases of insanity. Besides, we use it to cleanse brass and silver vessels. How different are the, two powers: that of attracting the divine forces and that of cleansing vessels. The same can be said about potency of sound: it brings us the power of the divine and at the same time does us good in a very mundane sense.

‘I won’t ask for anything myself. I won’t ask for this and that. Give that which you yourself think is best for me. Or it would be all right even if you do not give me anything. I read this hymn for the sheer joy I find in it.’ The devotee who has such an attitude belongs to the highest plane. However, *Ambāl* grants us whatever we ask her for.

Among the verses that bring a variety of benefits there are some occurring here and there in the hymn that have the power to

cure certain ailments. And there are a few that have the power to cure all diseases. the one in which occur the words, 'Thava vadana-Saundaryalahari' is an example. Besides there are slōkas that are recited to bring relief to people suffering from eye disease, ulcer, nervous trouble which is common these days, diabetes, rheumatism, diseases caused by sinful living, dumbness and so on. For eye and ear troubles you must recite Stanza 52. In it the *Āchāryā* says to *Ambāl*, 'Your eyes extend up to your ears' ('Gathe karnābhyarnam... imē nēthre'). Even to think that *Ambāl*'s eyes extend up to her ears is to get relief from eye and ear troubles. In this there is correspondence between the meaning of the verse and the meaning of the sound [what it accomplishes]. But in another verse (58) there is no such correspondence: in this, though both eyes and ears are mentioned, the benefit brought by reciting it is relief from all ailments. Along with the eyes and ears mention is made of the space between them, 'pālī'. This space looks like the bow of Manmatha. The meaning is: 'Manmatha uses as an arrow your sidelong glance-which reaches up to your ear-to string his bow and aim it at *Paramēśvarā* and achieve victory.' The sound of the slōka has the power to cure all diseases. If you ask about the connection between the meaning of the verse and what it does, there is no answer. All we can say is that its 'sound value' is such.

I spoke about verses in the hymn that serve the purpose of manthras for the cure of one, no, two diseases, expelling a poison, healing a fever.

'*Kirantīm angēbhyah kiratīa-nikurumbāmrutarasam*'. One must meditate on *Ambāl* as one from whose body ambrosia keeps flowing in the form of rays. 'Himakaraśila mūrtimiva': she is the colour of moonstone. What is the colour of moonstone? How does a colourless crystal reflect moonlight? That colourless crystal is immaculate, cool, bright. One must meditate on *Ambāl* as one moulded of moonstone and emitting nectarine rays.

Ambāl is the colour of a stone that melts in the radiance of the moon, the moon that exudes snow. Through each hair of her body, through each pore, she emits a ray: to think thus itself is so pleasing and comforting to one running a temperature.

One who keeps meditating like this will acquire the nature of ambrosia. Ambrosia is the opposite of of poison. So one who meditates in the manner mentioned above will not be affected by snake bite and other poisons. The opposite of visha or poison is amrutha. Opposed to the one who possesses poison, the snake, is Garuda.

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‘GOOD SNAKE’ , ‘BAD SNAKE’

Garuda and the peacock are regarded as the worst enemies of snakes. *Mahā Vishṇu* has Garuda for his vehicle, while *Subrahmaṇya* has the peacock. The irony of it is that *Mahā Vishṇu* reclines on the serpent and, as for *Subrahmaṇya*, he is called Nagaraja; indeed in a number of places there are temples to him where he is worshipped in the form of a serpent.

How would you explain such contradictions? The same snake symbolises two different things or concepts. When it is in a man's *mūlādhāra*, and asleep in the form of *Kuṇḍalini*, it represents his sexual activity. It is then considered a bad snake, a poisonous snake, since the man's little vitality is spent in the form of sexual energy. It is this poison that Garuda and the peacock destroy. After the poisonous sexual activity ceases the *Kuṇḍalini* snake ascends to the *sahasrāra* and pours out ambrosia. There it becomes a 'good' snake, not a cobra, but a benign snake. When it is sleeping in the *mūlādhāra* chakra of a man it squanders his *prāṇik* energy as semen; but, when it is in the *sahasrāra*, it makes it (*sahasrāra* itself) ambrosia and disseminates the nectar inside. That semen is produced by *kāma* is well known. It is said that it becomes

ambrosia through the practice of *yōga*. You cannot deny this without practising *yōga* [and finding out the truth yourself].

The role of semen in procreation is a fact that is well known. There are men whom we call *yōgēsvaras* and *yōgasiddhās* (lords of *yōga*, accomplished adepts in *yōga*) but we have not known them to be immortal through the flow of amrutha in them. We hear of them living up to the age of 300 or 400, but, then, they too die. So how can we believe this phenomenon of the flow of amrutha?

There is a difference between this ambrosia and the celestial ambrosia that keeps the body imperishable for very long. All that the celestial ambrosia does is to keep the body alive for long. It has nothing to do with the advancement of the Self. *Dēvāmṛutha* (the celestial ambrosia), the product of the churning of the ocean of milk, is like a medicine, medicine of a high order. It protects the body for long, that is all it can do. It has no power to protect what is within the body, '*sāririka*' or the *Ātmā*. The celestials who have consumed ambrosia, have they become *jñānis*? As for mortals, after years of sensual enjoyment, they will become old and weak, develop disgust with such pleasures, and exclaim, 'Enough, enough of all this.' They will eventually develop detachment. But the celestials do not lose their health, nor do they age, so they have no way of escaping sensual enjoyment and developing detachment, passionlessness. True *yōgis* will not be interested in *yōga* if all that the *Kuṇḍalini* does is to create ambrosia that makes the body imperishable for long merely for petty pleasures. They practise *yōga* in their quest for eternal bliss. In it, in their practice of *yōga*, the flow of ambrosia in the *sahasrāra* represents the state of joy prior to that of non-dualistic realisation. Although this ambrosia has the power to keep the body healthy and bright until it lasts it has a more important function to perform, that of bestowing divine bliss. The *Śāktha yōgi* does not, unlike the *jñāni*, dismiss the body and the world as *Māyā*: he sees it all as the sport of *Ambālī*, as the manifestation of her *Śakthi*. So this ambrosia enables him to

witness the sport of *Ambāl* as long as he wants to dwell in his body. But however long-lived he may be, three hundred years, three thousand years or thirty lakh years, he may at one stage be inspired by the. non-dualistic desire to become one with *Ambāl*. Then he too will shed his body.

Like the peacock and Garuda the snake has another born enemy, the mongoose, which is called 'nakula' in Sanskrit. There is an aspect of *Ambāl* known as *Nakulēsvari*. *Lalithāmbāl*, the queen-empress, has a minister known as '*Mantrīnī*' which name is also applied to *Ambāl*. She is also called '*Māthangi*'. Although only a minister, the queen-empress has endowed her with all her power and authority. 'My portfolio will be that of blessing my devotees. You be home minister and rule all my three worlds.' Thus she delegates her authority now and then to Mantrini. That is the reason why she is called '*Mantrīnī-nyastha-rājyadhūh*' in the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*, the name meaning, 'the one who entrusts the rule of her empire to *Mantrīnī*'. This *Māthangi* is called '*Rāja-Māthangi*'. She is the *Mīnāmbikā* of *Mad(h)urai*. It is she whom we describe as the queen with the authority to rule. It is amusing to know that we call her '*Nakulēsvari*', the 'mongoose goddess'. The reason for this: the *Kuṇḍalīnī* snake in the *mūlādhāra* performs a function that goes against the Athmic advancement of a man while *Nakulēsvari*, as the foe of the snake, blesses us with inward riches.

Mūlādhāra is also known as 'kula'. In the *Saundaryalaharī* itself we find the words, '*Kulakuṇḍē svapiṣi...*': She keeps sleeping in the *mūlādhāra* without any awareness of the world of the Self. The one who creates the opposite state, making the *Ātmanā* to unfold itself, is *Nakulī*. The opposite of 'kula' is 'nakula'.

Among the three enemies of snakes, Garuda, the peacock and the mongoose, there is something special about the first. Garuda not only kills poisonous snakes, he is the one who brought amrutha. The mother of snakes is his stepmother. She enslaved his

mother and when he requested her to free her she laid down a condition. She said: 'I will free your mother if you bring ambrosia from the celestial world to feed my children.' Garuda went to the celestial world, successfully fought with Indra and returned to earth with the pot of ambrosia. But in the end the snakes could not partake of it -- such is the story. Garuda eats snakes, doesn't he? I wanted to speak about his connection with amrutha. In Srivilliputtūr, where *Āndāl* descended to earth, Garuda is offered a delicacy called 'amrutha-kalasam' and it resembles a '*suyyan* '[*sukhiyan*]. The delicacy is so shaped that its outer part must be regarded as the kalasa and the stuffing inside (the 'purnam') as amrutha.

The 'modhaka' too represents the same principle. It is mentioned variously that *Vignēsvara* has a pot of amrutha, a pot of jewels, a pomegranate, a modhaka. The *kalasa* or pot has gems inside it and likewise the pomegranate looks gemset with seeds in it. The outer covering of the modhaka and its stuffing or 'purnam' correspond to the *kalasa* or pot and the ambrosia inside it. *Garudāzhvār* is particularly important in Srivilliputtur. If in all other temples (Vaishṇava) Garuda is in front of Perumal (*Vishṇu*); in Srivilliputtur he is by his side in the sanctum itself. Perumāḷ is flanked by Garuda and *Ambāl*. There is a story behind this. In Srirangam Sri Ranganatha made *Āndāl* one with him. Then *Periyāzhvār* (her foster-father) lamented: 'After giving me such a noble foster-child you have snatched her away from me. Is it right on your part to torment me like this?' Thereupon Perumal said to him: 'Do not grieve. I will come to Srivilliputtūr and after marrying Andāl in the proper manner reside there permanently.' It was then that, in the twinkling of an eye, Garuda brought them to Srivilliputtur. It was in appreciation of this act of Garuda that Perumal has him also by his side as an equal of *Āndāl*. It is believed that *Periyāzhvār* himself is an aspect of Garuda.

As we have seen, Garuda is associated with amrutha or ambrosia and he frees people from poison. The *Āchāryā* says that he who meditates on *Ambāl* as one made of the *Chandrakānta* stone and emitting ambrosial rays will, like Garuda, control the poison of snakes. 'Sa *śarpāṇām darpam samāyāti śakuntādhipa iva*'. 'Śakuntādhipa' means king of birds, that is Garuda. 'Śakunta' means bird. The child born to *Mēnaka* and abandoned by her was cared for by birds : that is why she came to be called 'Śakuntala'. 'Pakshirāja' is a name found among Ayyangars [Tamil Vaishṇava Brahmins]; the name means Garuda, king of birds. But the name 'Garudāchār' is common among Madhvas.

By reciting this verse (20) you will get twofold relief, from poison caused by snake bites or any insect or animal bite and from viral fever. After all viral fever is caused by viruses entering the body.

Another point, about fever in general. As mentioned here, if a man keeps meditating on *Ambāl* as one with rays that rain nectar, he himself will come to have an 'amrutha nādhī', an ambrosial nerve, or we may take it that the ambrosia in his sahasrara will flow in his nerves. Such a man, one who has his eyes with nectarine nerves, has to do no more than glance at one suffering from fever, and the fever will vanish in a trice.' '*Jvaraplushtān drushtyā sukhayati sudhādhārasirayā*'.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF RED THE INNER MEANING OF 'ATTRACTION'

Although *Ambāl* is the colour of crystal, she is spoken of here as having the complexion of the *Śrīvidhya* deity, i.e. red. Red indeed is what gives her distinction. Does not the sky become red during sunrise? If a man meditates on *Ambāl*, imagining that the lustre of her body casts redness not only on the sky but on

everything from the sky to the earth, that all cosmos acquires a redness, he will be blessed with the power of attraction. This is mentioned in an earlier stanza (18). We must not be attracted by this subject of attraction. It can lead us to wrong things. That is why I made a 'high jump' and came to a later stanza. However, I wished to speak about the special quality of the redness of *Ambāl* and I turned to that stanza because I thought it would be a good idea to speak about the inner meaning of what is called 'attraction' (or bringing people under one's influence or power).

'*Vāṣikaram*', '*strīvaśyam*', obtaining the beauty of Manmatha and so on are dealt with in the *Saundaryalaharī* and similar *Śāktha* works. It would be perilous to understand them in a literal sense. When a man tries to attract others what happens in reality? It means he himself has been attracted by them; he therefore uses the vāśya manthra in order to possess them, to hold them in his power. When he amasses money, acquires a house and landed property, he believes that he is the owner of all these assets. But in reality it is he who is owned by them, who is enslaved by them. When he is deprived of what he owns he suffers. Does it not mean, then, that he is subject to them? If a man attempts *vāśyam*, i.e. tries to bring an object or person under his control or possession, in reality it is he who is a victim of that act of *vāśyam* since he is enslaved by the object or person that is the target of his *vāśya* manthra. To put it differently, he becomes a slave to the desire of bringing others under his influence. If such is the case, the way will remain closed for him to meditate on *Ambāl*, to have her always in his mind and reach eventually the ultimate objective of Self-realisation.

Do you think that the *Āchāryā*, other great men and seers who propounded the manthra *Śāsthrā* would have taught such a method [which would prevent a man from reaching higher goals]? When the *Āchāryā* speaks of the mental state of the devotees of *Ambāl* he says: '*Mrudita malamāyēna manasā*' (Stanza 21). It

means that the mind of the devotee will be free of all impure thoughts and desires, that it will keep *Māyā* suppressed. The man who worships *Ambāl* must perform a '*Kālinga mardana*' of *Māyā* [he must keep *Māyā* crushed in the same way as *Krishṇa* subdued the dread serpent *Kālinga*]. It would not be just to associate him, the devotee of *Ambāl*, with inferior and unsavoury forms of *vāśya*. So we have to understand what is said about *vāśya* thus: that the *sādhakā*, the devout practitioner or seeker in question, does not become subject to the attraction or influence of anything and that his mind is always under control. That which he is said to have brought under his power (that is that which is subject to his *vāśya*) is to be understood as something that has been absorbed in him. It is like what the Lord says in the *Gītā*: '*Samudram āpah praviśanthi yadvat thadvath kāmā yam praviśanthi sarvē.*' Like all rivers drawn by the ocean into it and brought under its control – so does not becoming '*vāśya*' mean 'drawn'? After all the rivers are drawn into the ocean. Can the ocean relate to the rivers as an independent entity, or can the rivers relate to the ocean as independent entities? The two, the rivers together and the ocean, become one non-dualistic entity--and '*śanthim āpnothi*', that is become utterly tranquil.

It is the same case with the *jñāni*: all desires flow into him and he reaches a state in which these desires are annihilated. The desire for objects that exist as dual outwardly are internalised by him (by the *jñāni*) and this is figuratively spoken of as '*vāśya*'. If you make an object not merely your own but make it yourself how can it remain an independent entity inspiring desire in you for it? If all the three worlds are drawn into a man (*vāśya*) in the form of a woman, it means that the cosmos itself is not external to him but part of him, that is within him. And if he himself becomes like Manmatha, how can Manmatha triumph over him, pushing him into *kāma*? So the fact of a man assuming the appearance of Manmatha means he accomplishes *Kāmajaya* (conquest of *Kāma*);

that is how the idea of one assuming the form of Manmatha must be understood.

Ambāl performs a twofold function: she turns *Paramēśvarā* into the act of creation and turns human beings back into the state of liberation. In the *Śrīvidhya* system she is referred to as bright red in colour. *Pārvathī* is green, *Gaurī* is white though she is also mentioned as being yellow. *Kālī* is dark, while *Durgā* is blue. Our *Kāmēśvari* is red like *arunodaya*, red like the sky before sunrise.

What is specially remarkable about this red? To explain in terms of the physics of light: red indicates *Śiva* and *Śakthi* creating the universe and, on the reverse side, the act of dissolution, of transcending creation and becoming one with the Ultimate.

When red separates itself first from sunlight which is white (and does not belong to the category of any colour), the other six colours of VIBGYOR are revealed. In the seven letters of VIBGYOR the colours are revealed beginning with the last letter. The end colour R is red. When it becomes separated, orange (O), yellow (Y) green (G), blue (B), indigo (I), and violet (V) are revealed. Beyond R, at the right-hand end, is white which does not belong to any category of colour; and adjacent to V, at the left-hand end, is black which too does not belong to any category of colour. Why are black and white not included among the colours? We see various objects which have various colours. One is green, another is blue. The object that is seen as green reflects green and absorbs all other light waves. The same is the case with a blue object: it reflects blue and absorbs all other light waves. Light waves pervade everywhere and we see two phenomena with regard to them. One kind of light wave is reflected (by objects) and all other light waves are absorbed. What is reflected or revealed is called its colour. A white object does not absorb any light wave and reflects all light waves. The reflected colours together form white. Of the two phenomena of reflection and absorption there is only one in the case of a white

object - reflection. That is why white is not included among the colours. In the case of a black object it absorbs all light waves and does not reflect any. Here too we see only one of the two phenomena, absorption.

We speak of the three *guṇas*, *sathtva*, *rajas* and *thamas*. That which does not hold within itself anything as its own and releases everything outside and that which is pure, bright and white is *sathtva*. It is the mark of *jnāna* and the *Parabrahmam*. That which holds or retains everything as its own is black and it is *thamas* and utter *ajnāna* or nescience. Red is *rajas*, that is *kriyāśakthi*, the power of doing, of action, energy. The act of turning the *Brahmam* into the individual Self and the act of taking the individual Self back into the *Brahmam*: it is *kriyāśakthi* that is behind both. From *Siva*, that is the nature of *jnāna*, functionless and white, has originated *Parāśakthi* to become manifest as the bright red *Kāmēśvarī*. Following this has occurred all creation leading up to nescience that is *thamas*. The seven colours, VIBGYOR, are steps that represent the variety of creation. All the colours mingling together will form white. All this cosmos arose from the *Brahmam* that is pure and it will cease itself by becoming the *Brahmam* again. The primordial cause of all this universe, creation, arising from the white *Brahmam*, is the entity that first emerged from it, the red *Kāmēśvarī*. That is why redness has a special importance. If the process is reversed and all of us who are steeped in the darkness of *thamas* are to become dissolved in white it is the 'lady in red' who will show the way.

The great joy of becoming united in love can be experienced only when such union takes place after separation. It is only after being separated from each other that any two can meet again. Without such separation, if one remains by oneself, where can there be the joy of oneing? That is the reason why the primordial entity separates itself into *Śiva* and *Śakthi*, then the two become

the *Kāmēśvara-Kāmēśvarī* couple and thereafter the primordial entity divides itself in creation as its children. Looked at in this way it is to experience love and affection that the Root entity, that is white, becomes red. That is why love, specifically erotic love (*Srungara*), is said to be red.

The root of creation is red. The primordial entity which had no desire was inspired by desire: this was the prime cause of creation. That is why creation is said to be red. The one who performs the function of creation, Brahma, is red-complexioned. There is life in any sentient being because of blood circulation. And blood is red. In fact the Sanskrit word for blood, 'rakta', itself means red. What does the poet do? He creates his poem with his desire. By imparting his experience he thereby brings about a kind of union with others. That is why the poetic gift is understood to be red.

Compassion is the manifestation of love in its mature form. It is the highest form of all love, flowing from the fountain that is the *Paramātmā*. That is why it is said later in the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 93): 'The entity called Sambhu, that is the colourless *Parabrahmam*, assumes the form of aruna (red) for the purpose of protecting the world; indeed becomes aruṇa out of his karuṇa or compassion; and goes about triumphantly' (*'Jagat trātum Śambhōr jayati karuṇa kāchidarunā'*). In the previous stanza the *Āchāryā* says: 'The light of your redness, falling on *Paramēśvarā* who is as bright as a crystal, makes him an embodiment of love (*Srungāra*)'.

We already know that sathtva is white, and rajas is red. We also know that rajas is inferior to sathtva. Then why is red so much glorified here? There must, of course, be two for the phenomenon called love which is part of dualism. When love manifests itself in the *Brahmam*, which is non dual, satthvik and pure white, it becomes rajasik red of the most exalted kind.

The Individual Self finds fulfilment in being in the quiescent, serene and satthvik state. When a man does work in a rajasik manner he loses his serenity and is thereby diminished. But the serene *Paramātmā*? Even when he is engaged in the phenomenal world he does so with his tranquillity undisturbed. His true body that is like crystal remains as it is and the red is just reflected in it. So there is no diminution in his case.

We must advance from the wrong kind of rajas to its finest and noblest manifestation and *Īśvarā* will through his compassion and love, which are the highest of the high aspects of rajas, raise us to the state of Brahman which is beyond all qualities (like satthva, rajas and thamas).

Kundumani, bitter gourd and *pādhiri* fruit, all three are red. But in quality they are so different from one another. *Kundumani* is poisonous; bitter gourd, though bitter (as the name itself suggests), is beneficial to the body; and the *padhiri* fruit is sweet to taste and at the same time good for the body. In the same way there are different states of *rajō gunā* with different characteristics: the rajas that keeps you bound, the rajas that has the goal of liberation, the rajas that lifts you up to the state of liberation. The redness of *Kāmēśvari* is the redness that elevates you.

It is not at all proper to regard the redness that frees us from bondage as a *vasya* force, as something that keeps us under its power or influence.

The *Āchāryā* observes (Stanza 18) that one must meditate on *Ambāl*'s red colour as '*Śrīsarani*' that wipes away everything from the sky down to the earth. '*Śrī*' denotes all that is fortunate and auspicious, the richness that fills the Self. In this hymn *Ambāl*'s beauty is referred to as '*Śrī*'. '*Śarani*' means the same as *lahar*, a wave, a flood. So '*Śrīsarani*' is the same as '*Saundaryalaharī*'.

One of the early stanzas (12) begins with the words 'Thvadhīyam saundaryam' (the beauty that is yours). Here 'Śrīśaraṇī' occurs as a synonym for 'Saundaryalaharī'. It is an indication that the 'Ānandalahari' section has the goal of taking us to 'Saundaryalaharī' Yanthra and manthra *Sāsthrās* and philosophical concepts, the purpose of all is to enable us to behold the beauty of *Ambāl*.

This beauty, this beautiful form, is 'contained' in the image created through the *kēsādhi-pādānta* description. But the effulgence radiating from her red complexion fills the entire universe.

In the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam* *Ambāl*'s weapons are mentioned before the *kēsādhi-pādānta* description. The weapons and other objects held in the hands of a deity are referred to only when the portrayal, starting from the tresses of hair, comes down to the hands. But in the *Sahasranāmam* they occur earlier. First the noose, then the goad, the bow and arrows. Besides, what we have is not a mere listing of the weapons but the concept or principle behind each. When mentioning the noose (*pāśa*) it starts with the word 'rāga': 'Rāgasvarūpa-pāsādhyā'. 'Rāga' denotes both red and desire. Here it is the right type of rāga, that which frees us from the bondage caused by the wrong type of raga and binds us with *Ambāl*. *Dvēsha* or hatred must be completely eradicated. For this purpose there must be hatred against hatred, anger against anger: they must both be pierced again and again with the goad and kept under check. Then we must offer our five sense organs and our mind at her feet. I have already told you that it is to attract them that she wields the bow and the arrows. Only after this would you be enabled to behold her from head to foot.

Before we are enabled to see her in this form, before we can see her in a form of certain proportions, we can see only her red colour pervading all universe, all space. So prior to mentioning her

name that suggests the beauty of her hair, the *Sahasranāmam* has this: '*Nijāruṣa prabhāpūramajjad-Brahmāṇḍa-mandalā*'. It means the same as what is mentioned in the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 18): '*Divam sarvam urvīm aruṇimānimagnām*'. We become immersed in the red of her love and compassion and our own love arising from devotion increases. We will then, at once, be afforded a glimpse of *Ambāl* from head to foot.

Ambāl's first name in the *Sahasranāmam*, '*Śrīmātha*', indicates that she is the Mother of all of us, the one who created us. The next name, '*Mahārājñi*', suggests that she protects and sustains us. The third name is '*Simhasanesvari*'. '*Simha*' denotes 'himsa', violence, destruction. These functions, creation, sustenance and destruction, are the sport of chith-jyothis, the light of consciousness [*Ambāl*]. Denoting that primordial *Sakthi* or power is the name '*Chidagnikunda-sambhūta*'. That which knows no origin, *Chithsakthi* (the power of consciousness or *jñāna*) appeared in the form of *Lalithāmbāl* is obliquely hinted at in this very name, but clearly stated in the next. To free the celestials from the atrocities perpetrated on them by *Bhandāsura*, *Chithsakthi* took birth as *Lalithāmbāl*. This is implied in the name '*Dēvakāryasamudyatā*'. The celestials, unable to bear the sufferings inflicted on them by the asuras, offer their bodies to *Ambāl* by sacrificing themselves in the fire. When their inert bodies had perished and their life remained as chith, *Ambāl*, the source of all chith, appeared as *Lalithā* and restored the celestials to life. (Later she slew *Bhāṇḍāsura*.) All this is implied in the name, '*Chidagnikundasambhūta*'.

The names of *Ambāl* mentioned first in the *Sahasranāmam* indicate her three functions [creation, sustenance and dissolution] and the context in which she appeared as *Lalithāmbāl*. The name occurring after these points to the redness of her lustre, '*Udyadbhānu-sahasrābhā*', one whose colour is that of a thousand rising suns.

Immediately after mentioning *Ambāl*'s red complexion her four hands and the four weapons wielded by her are noted (we had seen their names earlier). Then comes her name indicating that her red colour wipes away all the realms of the universe.

The reason why, after starting with the tresses of *Ambāl*'s hair, her hands are dealt with before depicting the body in between is to make known that she is *kriyāsakthi*, the creative energy. After all, has not the functionless Brahman become *Ambāl* so as to perform certain functions? '*Kārya*' is what the kara (hand) does. Hence the hands of *Ambāl* are mentioned first. It is *icchāsakthi* (the power of desire) that supports the kriya on both sides. That is why the name '*Udyadbhānu-sahasrābha*' comes before the description of the hands and after it occurs the name '*Nijārūṇīprabhāpūra-majjad-Brahmānda-mandalā*'. The words used by the *Āchāryā* mean the same: '*Divam sarvam urvīm aruṇīmanīmagnā*'.

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THE 'SAHASRANĀMAM' AND THE 'SAUNDARYALAHARĪ'

Here [the reference is to the concluding sentence of the previous chapter] what is said in the *Saundaryalaharī* seems like an exact impression of the description of *Ambāl* as found in the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*. There are any number of instances of the correspondence between the two works. If one were to conduct a research into the subject it would become a 'study' on its own. In the latter part of his hymn the *Āchāryā* closely follows the *Sahasranāmam* in his depiction of *Ambāl*.

Ambāl's forehead looks like the half-moon inverted, says the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 46) which is an improvement on the *Sahasranāmam*'s '*Ashtamīchandra - vibhrāja - dalika - sthala śobhitā*'. The *Āchāryā* says that when *Ambāl* opens her eyes the

worlds are created, that when she closes them it is the deluge of dissolution (Stanza 55) which reminds us of '*Unmēshanimishōtpanna-vipanna-bhuvanāvalī*' of the *Sahasranāmam*. In the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 62) it is mentioned that the red coral branch growing in the sea (*vidrumalata*) is no match for *Ambālī*'s lips. The same idea is expressed in the *Sahasranāmam* with the name, '*Navavidrumabimbaśrī-nyakkāri-radanacchadā*'. *Ambālī*'s speech excels in sweetness the song played on the vina by Sarasvathi: this is what is meant by the name in the *Sahasranāmam*, '*Nijasallāpa-mādhuryavinirbhartsita-kacchapi*'. The same idea the *Āchāryā* has developed into an entire stanza (66) in his hymn: '*Vipanchyā gāyantī...*' When describing *Ambālī* from head to foot, he brings in some appropriate comparison or other but in some contexts he feels his comparisons are not adequate. In one stanza (67) he asks: 'How can I describe your chin which is incomparable?' '*Kathamkāram brūmastava chubukam aupamyarahitam?*' In the *Sahasranāmam* also the name referring to the chin implies that it cannot be compared to anything: '*Anākalita-sādrusyachhubukaśrī-virājītā*' - 'one who shines with the beauty of her chin that has no comparison'. In the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 83) *Ambālī*'s leg is said to be the quiver containing the arrows Manmatha has gathered to gain victory over *Paramēśvarā*. The source of this idea is the *Sahasranāmam*, which has the name, '*Indragōpa-parikshipta-smara thūnābha-janghikā*'. The *Āchāryā* says (in Stanza 84) that *Ambālī*'s feet shine as they are placed on the head of Mother *Vēdha* (*Sruthī-siras*), while the *Sahasranāmam* says with much beauty that the *sindūra* smeared on the parting of the hair of Mother *Vēdha* is made by the dust on *Ambālī*'s feet: '*Sruthisīmantasindurikrutha-pādabjadhūlikā*'. In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs this name: '*Padadvayaprabhājālaparakruthasarōruhā*'. It means that the lotus is put to shame by the lustre of *Ambālī*'s feet. The *Āchāryā* elaborates the same idea in his verse (87) starting with the words, '*Himanihantavyam*' and states

how the lotus is overcome by shame by *Ambāl's* feet. The idea is explained through the different ways in which the lotus is put to shame by the goddess's feet. One: the lotus wilts in the snow, while *Ambāl's* feet do not because the mountain of snow is *Ambāl's* place of birth and she was also married there [her parents' home as well as her husband's home is the abode of snow]. So her feet always find delight in being in the snow. Two: at dusk the lotus closes its petals while *Ambāl's* feet are always ablossom so to speak. Three: the lotus has Lakshmi with it. Does not Lakshmi reside in the lotus? The feet of *Ambāl* dispense wealth (Lakshmi) to those who adore them. 'Your feet triumph over the lotus,' the *Āchāryā* concludes thus.

'*Kūrmaprushta-jayishrṇu-prapadānvitha*' is one of the names of *Ambāl* in the *Sahasranāmam*: it means 'one whose upper feet (insteps) are superior to the back of a tortoise. In the *Saundarya-lahari* (Stanza 88) the *Āchāryā* says: '*Prapadama-padam..kathina-kamathī-karpara-thulām*'. The tortoise is known as *kūrma*, *kamatha* and *kacchapa*.

In one stanza (91), the *Āchāryā* observes that the auspicious jewelstudded anklets that *Ambāl* wears on her feet jingle: '*Subhagamāni manjīra raṇṭita charaṇa kamalam*.' Here not only the idea, even the words, follow the *Sahasranāmam* text: '*Sinjana mani-manjīra-mandita sripādambuja*'.

If you examine the two texts closely, the *Saundaryalaharī* and the *Sahasranāmam*, you will find more such parallels.

Should the *Āchāryā* have used in his hymn words and ideas from the *Sahasranāmam*? The answer is that what he has done shows in a sense not only his greatness but also his humility. If he had borrowed ideas and words from a lesser known work he could be accused of plagiarism. But the *Sahasranāmam* is a work not only widely known among devotees of *Śrīvidhyā*, it is also a text of great

importance. If he borrows anything from such a work does it not show how he respects it, how he is devoted to it? And does it not also mean that in his humility he feels he cannot say anything more than what it has already said [in the stanzas of the work from which he has borrowed]? No example is needed other than his own descriptions in the *Saundaryalaharī* to prove his wealth of imagination and originality. His *pādādhi-kēsa* and *kēśadhi-pāda* hymns to *Śiva* and *Vishṇu* are replete with ideas that arise from an original creative mind. That being the case, he could have, if he had wished, given his own descriptions of *Ambālī* in the stanzas where he has drawn from the *Sahasranāmam*; and these descriptions would have been such as to arouse our wonder. If he has not done so, and has instead borrowed from the *Sahasranāmam*, it means that he wants to show his esteem for it and at the same time wants others too to respect it.

Thus we can look at it [the *Āchāryā* drawing words and ideas from the *Sahasranāmam* in a human way and interpret the same in a humble manner. Or, considering the fact that he was a divine incarnation, explain his conduct on a lofty plane. Who was, or who is, the *āchāryā*? He was an incarnation of *Īśvarā* together with *Ambālī*. It is not that he is one and *Ambālī* another. And who created the *Lalithā-Sahasranāma*? The *Vāgdāvatās* known as the *Visinyadhi Śakthis*. It was *Ambālī* herself who granted them the power to compose the work. All speech is her property, all words. And there is no doubt that the words revealed by the *Vāgdēvatās* are *Ambālī*'s own. She bade the *Vāgdēvatās* thus: 'For the well-being of the world create a hymn consisting of my various names.' It is said that *Ambālī* not only bade them compose the hymn but also cast her sidelong glance on them and thereby endowed them with the power to carry out her bidding. When she herself appeared as the *Āchāryā* [as her incarnation] to compose a hymn there is nothing wrong in his incorporating in it ideas from the *Sahasranāmam*. Is it wrong to take a seedling from our own farm

and plant it in the garden we want to make in the backyard of our house? The *Āchāryā* himself says, as he concludes his hymn, that the work was created out of *Ambāl*'s own words: 'Thvadhiyabhih vagbhih'.

In the *Gītā*, Sri *Krishṇa Paramātmā* has used a number of words and ideas from *Śrūthi* texts like the *Katōpanishad*. In the beginning these *Śrūthi* (or Vēdhic) manthras were part of his very breath. Later they occurred to the minds of seers (they were revealed to them) through his own grace. So, with a sense of liberty, he included here and there in the *Gītā* words found in the *Śrūthi*. Similar is the case with the *Āchāryā* drawing upon the *Sahasranāmam* in composing his *Saundaryalaharī*.

In the next stanza (21) the *Āchāryā* speaks about those who are adepts in the *Kuṇḍalini yōga* becoming immersed in the flood of *Brahmānanda* (bliss of knowing the Brahman). He terms the flood of bliss as '*āhlāḍalaharī*'. This is one of many laharis in the '*Ānandalahari Saundaryalaharī*' hymn. *Ambāl*'s lahari of beauty, the *Āchāryā*'s lahari of inner experience, the lahari of grace, the lahari of poetry : there is a confluence of all these in the *Saundaryalaharī*. It is in this stanza (21) that the *Āchāryā* speaks of *Ambāl*'s devotee having 'crushed the impurities of his mind and *Māyā*': '*Mrudita-malamāyēna manasā...*'

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FROM 'DĀSŌ'HAM' TO 'SŌ'HAM'

The next stanza (22) is of great interest. Did I not tell you that the '*Ānandalahari*' section not only dealt with the *Śāktha Śāsthra*, that it also contained verses noted for their devotional fervour and poetic excellence? This *śloka* (22) is a good example of such a combination. In it, through the figure of speech called '*ślēsha*' (pun), we are lifted up from dualistic devotion to a sort of

non-dualistic state in which devotion, *Śākthi* and *jnāna* are mingled.

I wonder whether you paid close attention to what I said. I didn't say, 'from dualistic devotion to *jnāna*'. I said the *Āchāryā* lifted us up through this stanza to a sort of non-dualistic state in which *jnāna* is mingled with devotion and *Śākthi*. We can understand the idea properly only by following the verse from the very beginning.

Bhavāni thvam dāsē mayi vithara dhrushtim sakaruṇām
Iti sthōthum vānchan kathayathi Bhavāni thvāmithi yah
Tadhaiva thvam thasmai dhiśasi nijasāyujya-padhavīm
Mukunda-Brahmēndra-sphuta-makuta nīrājitha Padhām

'*Bhavāni*' = 'Mother *Bhavāni*.'

'*Bhāva*' is one of the names of *Śiva*. *Bhāva*'s *Śākthi* is '*Bhavāni*'. *Bhāva*, *Śarva*, *Īśāna*, *Paśupathī*, *Rudra*, *Ugra*, *Bhīma*, *Mahān* (*Mahādeva*): these are the special eight names of *Śiva* that is *Ashtamūrthi*. The one who 'exists' as the root or source of creatures is *Bhāva*, one who exists is *Bhāva*. His wife *Ambālī* is '*Bhavāni*'.

'*Thvam*' = you; '*dāsē mayi*' = in me who is your *dāsa* or minion; '*sakaruṇām*' with compassion; '*dhrushtim vithara*' = cast your glance. 'Mother *Bhavāni*, cast your glance on me, your glance that is your grace.' '*Iti*' = thus; ('may you cast thus'); '*yah*' = whoever. (There is no question of his -- *yah* -- being big or small, deserving or not deserving. Whatever be his nature or character, if he desires *Ambālī*'s sidelong glance....) '*Sthōthum vānchan*' = desiring to adore; '*Bhavāni thvam dāsē mayi vithara dhrushtim sakaruṇām*'. Speaking these words, desirous of praying for her sidelong glance -immediately after having said the first two words, '*Bhavāni thvam*'... '*Bhavāni thvam ithi yah kathayathi*': the second line means 'whoever says '*Bhavāni thvam*'. The word '*thadaiva*', with which the third line begins, means 'at once'.

He [that is the one referred to above as 'whoever'] begins to utter the two words ('*Bhavāni thvam*') to pray for *Ambālī*'s sidelong glance. And at once

What happens at once?

'Thadaiva thvam thasmai dhisasi nijasāyujya padhavīm'.

'Thadaiva' = at once, the very same moment. That is when someone, whoever it be, speaks the first line of this stanza as a prayer for *Ambālī*'s sidelong glance... No, he does not speak the entire line but only the first two words, '*Bhavāni thvam*'. And at once 'thvam' = you; 'thasmai' = for him; 'nija' = your, what is yours, what is natural to you, your own.... '*nija sāyujya padhavīm*' = your own state of *sāyujya*, of becoming one with you. To understand the same correctly, 'the state of becoming yourself'.... That someone, the moment he utters the two words ('*Bhavāni thvam*'), becomes you. Whoever pronounces the first two words of the stanza is granted by you *sāyujya* at once, the state of his becoming yourself. '*Disasi*' means 'you give, grant'.

'When a man wishes to pray to you thus: '*Bhavāni*, cast on me, your minion, your sidelong glance of compassion, that is when he starts saying '*Bhavāni thvam*', you grant him *sāyujya* in which he become one with you.' This is the meaning of the first three lines of the stanza.

The goal of a seeker is to become inseparably one with the object of his devotion, that is *sāyujya*. What is mentioned here is not non-dualistic union with the *Nirguṇa* Brahman obtained through *jñāna*. I say so on the basis of the fourth line of the stanza.

Mukunda is *Vishṭu*; '*Brahmendra*'. It means *Brahmā* and Indra. 'Sphuta makuta' = glittering crown. '*Nirājita Padhām*' is the concluding phrase. '*nirājana*' means the same as '*dīpārādhana*'. The one whose *dīpārādhana* is performed is '*nirājitha*'. '*Padhām*' = the feet. 'You grant the *sāyujya* of attaining your feet whose

dīpārādhana has been performed by the crowns worn by *Vishṇu*, *Brahmā*, Indra and so on.' *Brahmā*, *Vishṇu*, Indra and others prostrate themselves before *Ambāl* and, as they do so, they keep their heads at her feet. Then the lustre of the crowns worn by them falls on her feet. And this is like performing *dīpārādhana* for her feet.

If the devotee becomes one with *Ambāl*, *sāyujya*, it will mean that *dīpārādhana* is performed to his feet with the crowns worn by *Vishṇu*, *Brahmā*, Indra and others, says the *Āchāryā* because when he becomes one with *Ambāl*, his feet will be the same as those of the goddess.

It is different when one takes the path of *jñāna* and attains non dualistic *sāyujya*. In this state there is no question of a deity with feet and other limbs. Since there will be neither creation nor sustenance there will be neither *Brahmā* nor *Vishṇu*. Here, in this stanza, it is a case of 'saprancham', which implies the existence of the cosmos, worldly affairs and a deity with attributes. [It is nishprancha in non-dualistic *sāyujya*, that is there is no cosmos in it and it is union with an entity that has no attributes.] So what is mentioned here is not the *sāyujya* spoken of in Adhvaita.

The Parabrahmam becomes the *Parāśakthi* to be the cause of the universe and as its queen-empress she appoints celestials like *Brahmā* and Indra to conduct its affairs. Her position is so exalted that these celestials fall at her feet. The *sāyujya* mentioned here is that of the *jīvātmā*, the individual Self, achieving *sāyujya* with *Parāśakthi*. In other words the individual Self becomes one with *Parāśakthi*, that is becomes *Parāśakthi*.

An interesting point to note is that even in the Adhvaita system there is mention of such a state, though it is not its goal. Its ultimate state is *Nirguṇa*, being unconditioned and absolute; it is one of peace and it is not associated with *Śakthi* or with any function. However, if *Īśvara* (*Parāśakthi* is called *Īśvara* in the

non-dualistic system) does something, can we say, 'I am an Adhvaithi, don't do that'? Even if you are able to say so, will he listen to you? Who can compel him to listen to you? So he demonstrates his sport before the Adhvaithi also. That is the reason why in some Upanishadic passages, while speaking about the man who has no desire or who has no will or resolve of his own, it is stated, 'He gets all that he desires. All that he wills or resolves to do is accomplished.' It means that he obtains '*aiśvaryam*', that is the state of being *Īśvarā*. Even if he goes on the path of *jñāna* and wishes to be one with the *Nirguṇa Brahman*, *Saguṇa Parāśakti* tells him, 'Be one with me also and playing the drama of *Sakti* go to the state of *samādhi*.' Even after reaching that state of *samādhi* she will involve him in the drama and sport of *Śakti* in this world of work and action without his *samādhi* being interrupted.

The one who is made to do all this will not remain merely powerful in the end. Mere power will imply authority and the ego-sense accompanying it, but no experience of the divine, of the divine rasa. But the man who is not merely 'powerful' and has the grace of *Parāśakti* will be engaged in the dance of *Śakti*, experiencing the divine; he will ever have the consciousness of the divine and will mingle with *Parāśakti* with devotion and come face to face with her. Then, when he goes to a higher plane, he will not reveal his *sakti* himself nor will he manifest his will or desire. With the knowledge gained that all the frenetic activity and dance are both hers and his at the same time, he will remain experiencing beatitude. This devotion to *Ambāl* will be of a sublime nature. But, beneath all, there will be the awareness of serenity arising from the realisation that the basis of *Saguṇa Parāśakti* is *Nirguṇa*. It is the serenity perceived by the man going on the path of *jñāna*.

So here the *Āchārya* deals with *sāyujya* in which aspects of *jñāna*, devotion and *Sakti* are mingled, not the realisation of the *Brahman* taught in the Adhvaithic texts.

Now, about the pun I referred to earlier. The *Āchāryā* has made a pun on the words, '*Bhavāni thvam*'. When the devotee says '*Bhavāni thvam*' in one sense, *Ambāl* responds by making it the experience of a truth in another sense. The devotee says in the sense, '*Bhavāni*, you.' The word '*Bhavāni*' yields two meanings. It is a noun and in another sense a verb. '*Bhāva*' is its verbal root and it too yields two meanings, one as a noun and another as a verb. Then, with the suffix 'ni', the word '*Bhavāni*' also has two meanings. '*Bhāva*' as a noun means *Śiva* and so *Bhavāni* is *Bhāva*'s wife, *Ambāl*. '*Bhāva*' as a verb means 'may you be'. You see such usage in these examples: '*Dhīrghasumangalībhava*', '*Dhīrghāyushmānbhava*'; '*Jayavijayī bhava*'.

Take the words '*bhavān*' and '*bhavathi*.' The root of '*bhavān*' is '*bhavath*'. '*Bhavān*', '*Bhavathi*', mean respectively 'Sir', 'Madam'-and they convey respect. '*Bhavathi*' in the nominative, with a long i, becomes '*Bhavathi*' in the vocative. The grammatically correct form of addressing a lady is 'Hey! *Bhavathi*'. But in common usage it is '*Bhavathi*' alone. 'Madam, give me alms': the equivalent of this is '*Bhavathi, bhikshām dehi*'. '*Bhavān*' also in the nominative ends with a long syllable, while in the vocative it is short, 'Hey! *Bhavān*'.

If in our stanza (22) the *Āchāryā* has played on the word '*Bhavāni*', his disciple *Thōtakāchārya* has indulged in such verbal play with reference to the *Āchāryā* himself when he says of him: '*Bhava ēva Bhavān*'. '*Bhavān*' is a respectful form of addressing a person. '*Bhava ēva Bhavān*' means 'You are *Bhava*', that is 'You are indeed *Paramēśvarā*'.

We were speaking about '*Bhavāni*' having two meanings. As a verb '*bhāva*' means 'be'. '*Bhavāni*' will then mean 'I will be' or 'May I be'. So if in '*Bhavāni thvam*' '*Bhavāni*' is taken to be a verb the two words will mean 'May I become you'.

In Tamil and English the syntax is important. Not so in Sanskrit. 'Bhavāni thvam' can be written as 'Thvam Bhavāni'. 'Thvam' = you; 'Bhavāni' = 'I will be you.' Ambāl who grants her blessings in heaps would, it seems, understand the words thus. 'My child [my devotee] has spoken so. He says he will be. His words should not be belied.' In her supreme compassion she bestows *sāyujya* on him.

As for the devotee, he feels he does not merit Ambāl's motherly affection and so he does not regard himself as her child. He abases himself as her minion and, as a servant of hers, he prays for her sidelong glance, which itself he feels is a great blessing. Actually, the person in question may be a good-for-nothing fellow. That is why words like 'sādhu' and 'sūthi' [a learned or wise man] are not used where a mere 'yah' occurs. 'Yah' can be anybody. He may not know what is *sāyujya*, not even the word. However, when he utters the word, 'I will become you' Ambāl will answer his prayer and grant him *sāyujya*.

Bhagavān is the Lord and 'I am his dāsa' (which means the devotee is a minion of the Lord): to be two separate entities like this even in the liberated state is dualism. Ambikā grants non-dualistic liberation even to one who has a dualistic attitude. For now, she grants *Saguṇa* Adhvaitham. Having given this, she will also grant Adhvaithic union that is *Nirguṇa*.

Anjanēyaswāmī is one who keeps repeating 'Dāsō'ham', 'Dāsō'ham'. And he rose to the state of 'Sō'ham'. [From the state of the minion of the Lord he reached the state of becoming the Lord.] But even after advancing to that state he remains a minion of Rama. 'Dāsō'ham' = 'dāsah aham' = 'I am a dāsa'. 'Sō'ham' = 'Sah aham' - 'He (the *Paramāthmā*) is 1'. The *Āchāryā* says that all those who go to Ambāl saying 'Dāsō'ham' are raised to the state of their declaring themselves 'Sō'ham'.

‘I am the Brahman’ (*‘Aham Brahmasmi’*) is a pronouncement a person himself makes and ‘That art thou’ (*‘Thath thvam asi’*) is the pronouncement the guru makes to his, disciple. A seeker who meditates on these two *mahāvākya*s may find the goal (becoming one with the Brahman) beyond his reach however much he exerts himself for the same. But *Ambāl* grants him that state in her compassion without her being asked for the same. ‘*Bhavāni thvam*’: these words of the *Āchāryā* constitute a *mahāvākya* which goes even further than the *Vēdhic mahāvākya*s.

There is also a third meaning appropriate to the pun in this stanza. ‘Thvam’, when it is not an independent word but a suffix of a word means the quality of something, that is the quality of what is denoted by the word to which the suffix ‘thvam’ is added: it means ‘thatness’. For, instance, ‘kavithvam’ means the quality of poetry. When we say that so and so attained ‘amarathva’ it means he became immortal. [‘Amara’ immortal; ‘amarathvam’ = immortality.] In this way if ‘*Bhavāni*’ and thvam are read together as one word, (instead of two), the meaning will be *Parāsakthi’s Bhavānihood* [what makes *Bhavāni Bhavāni*] that. ‘*Bhavāni-thvam*’. When a man starts praying to *Ambāl* for her sidelong glance, what does the goddess do? Before giving him the opportunity to say the next word she interrupts and tells him, ‘Yes, child, there is indeed a state in which you become I’- and blesses him with the state of *Bhavāni* or *Bhavānithvam*.

So what we must do is to become *Ambāl*’s minion and sincerely pray for her sidelong glance. Since the *Āchāryā* has used the word ‘yah’, you should not mistake the line to mean that even a good-for-nothing man can obtain oneness with her by merely uttering the words, ‘*Bhavāni thvam*’, without being moved by devotion for her. One must truly lower oneself to be her slave, pray with whole-hearted devotion, to be graced by her sidelong glance.

We see here in this stanza that the devotee did not say his prayer fully; he merely wished to say it and spoke just the first two words of the prayer. By then *Ambāl* had granted him more than the blessing he would have asked for had he said his prayer fully. It is this fact that adds *rasa* to the stanza. '*Vāṇchā samadhiḥ*' [more than what is desired]: in a previous stanza (4) the *Āchāryā* had said that *Ambāl*'s feet themselves would give the devotee more than what he wished for. And here he says '*sthōthum vāṇchan*': before a man wishes to express his desire fully through his prayer, *Ambāl* blesses him with *sāyujya* which is far more than what he desires. And to say so is to create *rasa*. Here it is *karuṇā* *rasa*, the sentiment or mood of compassion. That the *Āchāryā* has conveyed it with such ease, through verbal play, is poetic *rasa*, the aesthetic experience arising out of poetry.

We realise from this that, if a man is well versed in the *sāsthra* of language and other subjects and is not vain about his learning and is mature in his devotion to *Ambāl*, thinking himself to be her minion—our *Āchāryā* was like that - he will not be indifferent even to people ordinarily considered unlearned or unwise and will discover in their speech truths of a profound nature. *Ambāl* will confer these truths on him to be personally experienced by him. If she reveals such truths to an unlearned and uncultured man will she not do so to a noble person who is broad-minded enough to discern words of wisdom in the speech of uncultivated people?

Though *Vaiṣṇavism* does not speak of *Nirguṇa* Adhvaitha nor accept it as part of the system, it has a concept according to which, an individual, on his becoming liberated, attains the state of *Saguṇa Mahāvishṇu* with all the god's powers and attributes. But when it says so, it makes one modification of the liberated status as *Saguṇa Mahāvishṇu*, and it is for the sake of propriety and in order not to offend against norms of good conduct: he will have all the qualities of *Vishṇu*, all his godliness, except that of being the

husband of *Lakshmī*. Non-dualist Saivism too says that on his liberation a man will become *Paramēśvarā* but he will not have the status of being the husband of Uma, that is *Pārvathī*. *Vaiṣṇavas* and others, unlike us *Adhvaithis* who on liberation have only one entity and that too without attributes, have to speak thus since they have, even in the state of liberation, divine couples like *Nārāyaṇa-Lakshmī* and *Śiva-Śakti*. When you say 'except for one thing' [the reference is to a devotee becoming *Vishṇu* or *Śiva* except for the fact that he does not have the status of the husband, as the case may be, of *Lakshmī* or *Pārvathī*] you may develop doubts about the other attributes the devotee will acquire on his liberation. When one wonders whether for followers of these systems [other than *Adhvaitha*] it is possible to achieve *sāyujya* with *Vishṇu* or *Śiva*, without such exceptions, this stanza opens a way. 'Do not practise meditation with the object of becoming directly *Nārāyaṇa* or *Śiva*. Instead, let the object of your meditation be becoming *Lakshmī* or *Ambāl*. Being Mothers, they may [in their motherly affection] bless you with such *sāyujya*. You will realise then that *Ambāl* is united with *Īsvara* or, if you are a *Vaiṣṇava*, that *Lakshmī* is united with *Vishṇu*. When you are dissolved in *Lakshmī* or *Ambāl* will it not mean that you have obtained *Vishṇu-sāyujya* or *Śiva-sāyujya* since *Vishṇu* and *Siva* are dissolved in *Lakshmī* and *Ambāl* respectively. It is only when a devotee obtains *sāyujya* in this manner that there will be no violation of the *pāthivrathya* dharma since the wife of the god in question is not separate but dissolved in him. This idea, though not expressly stated in the stanza, is latent in it.

In becoming father, after being mother, there is first *vāthsalya bhāva*; then mother becoming father means the manifestation of the highest aspect of devotion, that is *nāyikā bhāva*. This is what takes a man to non dualistic realisation, so have great men written from their own experience.

In an earlier stanza we saw that the celestial maidens imagine themselves to be one with *Śiva* since *Ambāl* reveals all her beauty only to him. The idea behind it is the reverse of what is suggested in the present stanza.

The *Āchāryā* has blessed us with a stanza in which he has 'kneaded' together philosophical concepts like Adhvaitha and Dvaita, learning and devotion, in which the devotee abases himself as a minion of the object of his devotion and in which he regards himself as a bride. He has given us a morsel to delight our aesthetic palate.

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THREE ĀRATHIS

The *Āchāryā* who states that the lustre of the crowns of Mukunda (*Vishṇu*), *Brahmā*, Indra and others serves the purpose of worshipping *Ambāl* with the waving of lights (*nīrājana* or *dīpārādhana*) speaks seven or eight stanzas hence (30) of the individual Self (that is the devotee) becoming one with *Parāśakthi*. And in this undifferentiated state of liberation [when he is inseparable from *Parāśakthi*] the fire of the great deluge of universal destruction serves as *nīrājana* for him.

'Mahasamvarthāgnir-virachayathi nīrājana-vidhim.'

The words mean that the man (referred to above) becomes *Ambāl*, that is the embodiment of Truth, transcending creation, time and so on. He is not merely 'yah', not 'anybody'. He is not one who is merely devoted and learned. He belongs to a higher level [higher than what devotion and learning can make him], says the *Āchāryā*. He refers to him as one who worships *Ambāl* in a non-dualistic attitude. In the '*Bhavāni thvam*' *śloka* the idea of 'I becoming you' (the devotee becoming *Ambāl* herself) occurred in the natural course of composing the stanza, as part of the poet's

view; the words did not reflect the intention of the man in question (yah). Here, (Stanza 30), it is different. In this verse the 'yah' is defined: he is conscious of what he does or says and the idea that he is *Ambāl* ('you are I') - [or 'I am indeed you'] - is ever present in his mind. 'Thvam aham ithi sada bhavayathi yah,' says the *Āchāryā*. He worships not in the attitude of a minion of *Ambāl* ('*Dāsō'ham*) but as one who identifies himself with her '*sō'ham*'. The *Āchāryā* further observes that the fire of the great deluge becomes the *ārathi* performed with the burning of camphor. What reduces everything to ashes becomes *dipārādhātna* for him, a means of adoring.

There are three *nīrājanas* mentioned in the *Saundaryalaharī*. The lustre emanating from the crowns worn by *Brahmā*, *Vishṇu*, *Indra* and others falling on the feet of *Ambāl* (as they place their heads at her feet) is one. The second: performed to the devotee whom *Ambāl* has non dualistically made one with her - and it means the *ārathi* is to *Ambāl* herself, *Ambāl*, the *Parabrahma-Śakthi* who does not perish even in the great deluge. This is the *nīrājana* performed by the great deluge. The third *nīrājana* is mentioned in the concluding stanza (100) of the hymn,

The three *nīrājanas* are for creation, sustenance and dissolution. However, they are not here in that order. First comes sustenance, followed by dissolution and creation. *Sthithi* is sustenance and protection carried out with compassion: this role is the most important for *Ambāl*. In *Prāṇava* (Om or Aum) syllables denoting creation, sustenance and dissolution come in the proper order -- a, u and m. But in what is called '*Dēviprāṇava*' (the *Prāṇava* of *Ambāl*), which is 'Uma', the syllable denoting sustenance 'u' comes first, then comes 'm'; denoting destruction, followed by 'a' which denotes creation. The three *nīrājanas* referred to in the hymn are in this order. The *nīrājana* performed by *Mukunda* and others with their crowns relates to sustenance.

They exist and since they keep sustaining us it means it refers to the period of sthithi or sustenance. There is an interesting point to note here: there is what is called internal evidence in the stanza (22) for sthithi being mentioned first. Usually we say Brahma, *Vishṇu* and so on. But here the god in charge of sthithi or sustenance, *Vishṇu*, comes first as 'Mukunda', then comes *Brahmā*. The one who destroys, Rudra, is not mentioned at all but instead Indra is mentioned.

The *nīrājana* performed by the great fire of deluge relates to *samhāra* or dissolution. This is clearly known to everybody.

The *nīrājana* in the last *śloka* of the hymn (Stanza 100) relates to creation. The *Āchāryā* says here that *Ambāl* herself was instrumental in creating the poetical work and that it is with it (with the hymn itself) that he performs the *nīrājana* to her. Just as *Ambāl* creates the world out of her inventive imagination, so too a poet creates poems, hymns, with his imagination. So the goddess herself is the original basis of what seems to be his composition. That original source of the *āchāryā*'s work, *Ambāl*, is the sun (*sūrya-maṇḍala*). And he shows his hymn to be the flame of a small lump of burning camphor before that effulgent sun.

Thus *Saundaryalaharī* with its three *nīrājanas* is a supremely auspicious offering. Here we see that the first *nīrājana* is the lustre of the crowns worn by *Brahmā*, *Vishṇu* and Indra.

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WHY RUDRA IS NOT MENTIONED SLEEP, DEATH AND THURĪYA SAMĀDHI

It is customary to speak of the Trinity as *Brahmā*, *Vishṇu* and Rudra in the context of the three functions the gods perform. A question arises here: why did the *Āchāryā* omit Rudra and mention Indra?

The intention of the *Āchāryā* in doing so is not to show that *Ambāl* is superior to the *Thrimūrthi*. This he has already done in the first two stanzas. The purpose here (stanza 22) is to tell us that her feet are worshipped even by very great celestials. He has mentioned three important gods. Of them *Vishṇu* who sustains us all, is the king of all the worlds; the king of the celestial world is *Indra*; and *Brahmā* is approached by all celestials whenever they are in trouble. *Indra* is not only the king of the celestials, he is also the guardian of one of the eight cardinal points-East. If he is mentioned as a '*dhikpāla*' [as a guardian of one of the cardinal points] it means the reference is to the sustenance of the world, that is the period of *sthithi*.

Being *nīrājana* for *sthithi*, the period of sustenance, the destroyer is not mentioned. I am stating one reason for the omission of *Rudra*.

Another reason is conceptual. *Sathtva*, *rajas*, *thamas*, and the state beyond the three, *Nirguṇa*: Creation or *srusti* relates to *rajas* and *Brahmā*; sustenance or *sthithi* relates to *sathtva* and *Vishṇu*; and dissolution or *samhāra* relates to *thamas* and *Rudra*. *Thurīya* relates to *Nirguṇa* and the *Brahmam*. We find that for each function and *guṇa* there is a deity. The fourth state, *thurīya*, is without any function: it is *Nirguṇa*, and as the word itself suggests, it has no *guṇa*. Creation, sustenance and dissolution correspond in a man's life to *jāgrath* (the waking state), *svapna* (dream) and *sushupthi* (sleep). A man has only one mind but in his imagination he dreams of many men, many places and many activities: this state of *svapna* is *srushti* or creation. In his wakefulness, *jāgrathhāvastha*, he is engaged in worldly activities: this is *sthithi* or sustenance. When everything has become calm and subdued and asleep, it is *sushupthi* and it corresponds to dissolution. When a man is asleep there is in his inner being an entity, a rudimentary life force, that does not sleep and is not attached to anything: it is

thurīya. The word means 'the fourth'. It is beyond the three states of *jāgrath*, *svapna* and *sushupthi*; unwise and uncultivated people like us are not at all aware of it. In the *Māndūkya Upanishad* it is referred to in language familiar to us as 'chaturtha'. *Jāgrath*, *svapna* and *sushupthi* concern human life, the *pinda* or microcosm, the tiny world of mortals. Creation, sustenance and dissolution belong to the macrocosm and they are the concern of *Īsvara* who conducts the big, big, world.

But *thurīya* is the same for both. That *thurīya* which inheres *Īsvara*, the *Saguṇa Brahman*, as its basic truth and which exists as the functionless *Nirguṇa Brahman*, it is the same as the *Ātmā* which is the basis of the three states [*jāgrath*, *svapna* and *sushupthi*].

I say all this to show that *samhāra* or dissolution is close to *thurīya*, the state of the *Brahman*, though it may not appear to be so. A man cannot remain in wakefulness or dream in the same way as he is in the *thurīya samādhi*, when his mind is subdued and he is serene. In *sushupthi* or dreamless sleep he is serene. But it is only in *thurīya samādhi* that he experiences the serenity as real. In *sushupthi* there is no awareness and there is no joy of experiencing the tranquillity. So it is a fact that these two states of *sushupthi* and *thurīya samādhi* are different. But considering the bustle and the gnawing the mind is subjected to in the state of wakefulness and dream, *sushupthi* is somewhat close to the experience of *thurīya*. If we enlarge this truth on a cosmic scale. *Rudra* who performs the function of dissolution and gives peace to all creatures, albeit temporarily, is closer to the *Parabrahman* that means eternal peace than to *Brahmā* the Creator and *Vishṇu* the Sustainer. It is this *Parabrahman* that the *Śaiva* and *Śāktha* systems refer to as 'Śivam'. That is why *Rudra* himself has come to be called *Śiva* despite the difference between the two. *Rudra* is the destroyer, *Mahēśvara* or *Īsvara* is the god of *thirōdhana* or veiling, *Sadāśiva*

or *Śiva* is the god who blesses ('*anugrahamūrthi*'), that is the one who grants final release. Above these aspects is *Śivam*, whom knowledgeable people regard as the Parabrahmam without any function. However, ordinary people do not make any distinction between Rudra, *Īśvarā*, *Śiva* and *Śivam*. But *Brahmā* and *Vishṇu* are not identified with any other deities.

What is said of the Lord (*Śiva*) applies to *Ambāl* also. *Parāśakthi* who is the total *Śakthi* of the Parabrahmam is considered the wife of Rudra, that is *Pārvathī*. The goddess of our hymn, *Kāmēśvarī*, is also that total, primordial *Śakthi*. *Parāśakthi* is not regarded as *Sarasvathī* or *Lakshmī*. In the *Saundaryalaharī*, she is addressed as '*Himagirisuthē*', '*Tuhinagirithanayē*', which are among *Pārvathī*'s many names, but not as '*Sarasvathī*' or '*Lakshmī*'.

We must note that Rudra alone is similar to *Śiva*, not *Brahmā* or *Vishṇu*. Here the *Āchāryā* intends to mention the deities who, by making obeisance to *Ambāl*, perform *nīrājana* to *Ambāl* with the glitter of their crowns. But he thinks that it is not proper to include her husband among them: it would not be in keeping with the norms of worldly conduct [the husband falling at the feet of his wife]. In the latter part of the hymn in which he has composed stanzas full of poetic rasa he states that *Paramaśiva* fell at the feet of *Parāśakthi*-and this after a lovers' quarrel. But the *Āchāryā* did not want to do the same in the earlier part in which greater importance is given to conceptual matters and thanthra. In the very first stanza of the hymn he clearly mentions *Ambāl*'s greatness and *Śiva*'s smallness [that he would be nothing unless united with her], that even to stir he has to be united with her. In the next stanza the *Āchāryā* says that *Śiva* performs his function of destruction with a speck of dust sticking to her foot. It must be because he does not want to bring him again and again below her level that, when speaking of great celestials, great deities paying

obeisance to *Ambāl*, he mentions Mukunda, *Brahmā* and Indra among them but not *Śiva* or Rudra who is akin to them.

Superficially seen, the *Āchāryā* may appear to mention clearly something different from what I have said (Stanza 25), that *Śiva* too fall at the feet of *Ambāl*. 'It would be enough if we worship your feet with flowers and it would be tantamount to worshipping all the members of the Trinity. It is so because they keep their heads at *your* feet and on them their folded hands.' Does it not mean that *Śiva* also prostrates himself at *Ambāl*'s feet like the other two of the Trinity? But if you examine the stanza carefully you will note that there is absolutely no room here to equate *Śiva* with Rudra, and that mention is made only of one of the members of the Trinity, Rudra, who is the destroyer. Also stated clearly is that the three deities making obeisance to her are born of her qualities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *thamas*: '*Thrayaṇām devānām thriguṇajanithānām thava Śivē*'. The reference here is to Rudra born of *thamas*, among her three *guṇas*. If *Śiva* were born of her *guṇa* would it not mean that he is her child? Is it not just and proper for a child to prostrate before its mother? I said this to show that *Paramēśvarā* who is in the position of *Ambāl*'s husband does not prostrate himself at her feet. While expressing the idea that *pūjā* performed to *Ambāl* includes worship offered to the *Thrimūrthi*, Rudra who is regarded as being equal or similar to *Śiva* cannot but be mentioned. While developing the idea that even great deities worship *Ambāl*, the *Āchāryā* has included the names of Mukunda, *Brahmā* and Indra but not the name of *Śiva*, or of *Īśvara* or of Rudra. These deities (Mukunda, *Brahmā*, Indra...) will vanish in the great deluge. The one-and the only one-who will remain then is not present here.

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DEVOTEES WHO ARE ADHVAITHIS NEVER PERISH

I shall speak about the subject referred to in the stanza dealing with the fire of the great deluge that serves the purpose of a *nīrājana*. It is mentioned in the stanza that those who worship *Ambāl* in the non-dualistic attitude of 'thvam aham' ('You are I') receive the *ārathi* [performed with the burning of camphor] in the form of the fire of the great deluge. It means these devotees do not perish even in the great deluge. But in a previous stanza (26) the *Āchāryā* says that during the time of *mahā-samhāra* (the great dissolution) all perish, including *Brahmā* and *Vishṇu*. But *Paramēśvarā* who keeps sporting with *Ambāl* does not. Then how can he say that those who worship her in the 'thvam aham' ('you are I') attitude are not destroyed? He can.

If these devotees were separate from *Ambāl* they too would perish. However, have they not become non-dualistically one with her? There is no question of any worship with *nīrājana* to a *Nirguṇa* entity. '*Svadhēhōdbbhūthābhīr ghrunībhīr anīmādyā-bhirabhītō*,' says stanza (30) about *Ambāl*. It is confirmed that *Ambāl* is in her *Saguṇa* state with the eight *aīśvaryas* emanating from her body as rays surrounding her. We must regard the 'thvam aham' devotees in the same manner as we understand the '*Bhavānī thvam*' minions or *dāsas* of *Ambāl* who have attained oneness with her. Whether it is in the *Saguṇa* or *Nirguṇa* manner, the fact is they have become one with her. However, if they are said to have been offered *dīpārādhana* as separate from her and referred to as 'they' the reason is this. Although they have the non-dualistic attitude that they are themselves performing the sport of the drama of deluge, they will have, at the same time, entwined with it devotion and joy in the fact that 'this lady (*Ambāl*) is performing such a sport with such power'. Nobody (no individual Self) will have the power of creation, sustenance and dissolution. That is attaining the

non-dualistic union with the *Saguṇa Brahmam* with all *aiśvarya* is not possible in practice. But to the devotee belonging to the highest plane, all that the *Saguṇa Brahmam* does will seem as if done by himself and it will be a feeling that goes deep in him. He cannot, however, be so in reality. To make up for this deficiency he will have the joy of witnessing with devotion what she does. In the *Saguṇa* state this is the highest experience afforded by the Parabrahmam. In truth, one wonders whether the *Paramāthmā* exists in the *Saguṇa* state to grant such an exalted experience to one in a hundred million.

With regard to those who are with *Ambālī* in a dualistic as well as non-dualistic sense: it is for the purpose of their witnessing the sport of the deluge that she has retained them dualistically. This means that they are not themselves trapped in that sport. It is those who are trapped as actors in the cosmic drama who will be caught in the scene of the deluge and perish in it. Those who have resigned from being actors and remain outside as spectators of the drama, how can they be involved in what is happening in the scene of the drama?

People who have, in a sense, developed the non-dualistic attitude to *Ambālī* in her *Saguṇa* aspect, and those who dualistically witness her drama - and only witness her drama but are not actors in it - these 'thvam aham' devotees (those who regard *Ambālī* as themselves) are beyond worldly affairs. When the *Āchāryā* says that '*Śiva* alone will survive', it is in the sense that when all others ensnared in the cosmic drama perish, he alone escapes. So there is no contradiction between the statement that *Śiva* alone survives and that those who regard themselves as *Ambālī* (the 'thvam aham' devotees) receive the fire of the great deluge as *nīrājana*.

The one whom we commonly call *Śiva* is not caught in the cosmic drama when he is *Kāmēśvarā* - *Śiva* and the *Nirguṇa* - *Śivam*. However, when he is Rudra, *Mahēśvara* and *Sadāśiva*,

carrying out the three cosmic functions, he too is caught in the cosmic drama. When the cosmos is destroyed, Rudra too perishes, even though he himself is its destroyer. If this does not happen, will it not mean that the destroyer Rudra will still remain without any function to perform even after the dissolution of the cosmos? If an office has been abolished, the officers, those who run it, become redundant and they have to go. When the cosmos itself ceases to exist those who perform the Panchakruthya relating to it will have to leave. When there is no creation, when there is none to be sustained, to be destroyed, to be trapped in *Māyā* or to be freed from it, where is the place for the celestials from *Brahmā* to *Sadāsiva*? Respecting *Ambāl*'s *saumāngalya* what will remain then are *Kāmēśvarā* who is inseparable from her and the *Nirguṇa Śivam* who is the very basis of her being. There is no need to speak specially of the fact that *Śivam* is the eternal Truth. It cannot but exist at any time. Apart from *Śivam* the one who remains after the great deluge is the husband for name's sake of Parabrahma - *Śakthi*, i.e. *Kāmēśvarā-Śiva*. It is to sport with her together that he came into being. The *Āchāryā* says (in Stanza 26): 'Viharathi Sathi thvathpathirasau.' [O Sathi, that husband of your sports himself.] That, later, the *Āchāryā* has spoken of *Ambāl* as '*Parabrahmamahishi*' is well known. Since it would not be appropriate to state that a *Nirguṇa* entity (one without attributes) sports together with *Ambāl* or *Parāśakthi*, we have to take it that the one who sports with her is *Kāmēśvarā-Śiva*.

In the stanza in which the *Āchāryā* speaks about devotees who regard themselves as *Ambāl* ('thvam aham'), he says that they consider *Śiva*'s *aisvarya* to be no more than a blade of grass, thus elevating them to great heights and lowering the Lord (*Śiva*) all at once: 'Thrinayana-samruddhin thrunayathah', so the *Āchāryā* observes in a beautiful alliteration. The three eyed *Śiva*'s *aisvarya* is no better than a blade of grass, '*thrunayathah*'. Why does the *Āchāryā* say so? Although *Śiva* has the exalted name of '*Īśvarā*'

has he any *aiśvarya* of his own? Is it not the sovereign queen *Ambāl* who has made him *Īśvarā*? It is the *aiśvarya* bestowed on him by her. It is 'by her leave' [the *Mahāguru* adds with a smile] that he rules. However those who worship her in the attitude of 'you are I' and become one with her make her *aiśvarya* their own. Before that *gāmbhīrya*, that profundity and majesty, *Īśvara* receives nothing. Also *Ambāl* does not confer all her *aiśvarya* on him. There are many other 'authorithies' to share it. Only those who worship her as 'thvam aham' and become one with her enjoy all her *aiśvarya* as their own. That is why it is said '*Thrinayana-samruddhim thruṇayathah.*'

This idea is expressed to heighten the worship of *Ambāl*, to give a more sublime character, in the non-dualistic attitude. It should not be taken all too literally. After all, *Ambāl* and *Īśvara* are not two separate entities. All that is hers is also his. She herself is his *aiśvarya*. '*Aiśvaryam Indumauleh,*' says *Mūka*.

I spoke about the profundity implicit in the attitude of those who seek identity with *Ambāl*. 'Thvam aham'. There is also humility in saying 'You are I' instead of 'I am you'. One of the *mahāvākyas* is 'I am the Parabrahmam' ('*Aham Brahmāsmi*'). Another says: 'This *Āthmā*.' (what appears as the *jīvāthmā*), 'indeed is the Brahmam.' The 'thvam aham' mentioned here and the *Vēdhic mahāvākyas* are the same in purport. Those without a proper understanding of this purport and those who go by the order of the words in the *mahāvākyas* will misconstrue the statements as 'the Brahmam is the *jīvāthmā*'. When you learn the *mahāvākyas* from a guru there will be no room for confusion about their meanings and you will know them clearly, 'That (the Brahmam) is you.' Also there is the suggestion that 'It is you who become I'. There is at the same time the humble attitude that 'without you I do not exist'. Apart from the fact that the meaning of the sentence is conveyed clearly there is an attitude of humility

in it. Besides, there is the profound feeling that the devotee has a right to *Ambāl's aiśvarya*, all of it. It is to enthuse the devotee that the *Āchāryā* states that *Īśvara's aiśvarya* is not worth more than a blade of grass for him (the devotee).

To sum up, the truth we must learn is this: the devotee (the individual Self) who has the attitude of oneness with *Ambāl* as well as *Īśvara* who is ever inseparably united with her are both imperishable.

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THE GLORY OF AMBĀL'S CHASTITY

In stanza 26, the *Āchāryā* refers to the *mahā-sambhāram*, the great dissolution. When *Śiva* remains sporting with *Ambāl*, all other deities, celestials, perish. The *Āchāryā* names them one by one.

Brahmā perishes in the great deluge, he says: 'Virinchih panchathram vrajathi.' *Vishṇu* comes to a full stop: 'Harirāpnōthi virathim.' He who destroys all, *Yāma*, is himself destroyed: 'Vināśam Kīnāśo bhajathi.' 'Kīnāśa' is a name of *Yāma*. The one who has in his possession more riches than anybody else is not saved by all his wealth; he too dies: 'Dhanadhō yāthi nidhanam.' 'Dhanada' is *Kubera*. 'Nidhanam' means end, death. Just as *Ambāl* sports herself during the great deluge, the *Āchāryā* indulges in word play: 'Dhanada-nidhanam'; 'vināśam-Kīnāśa'. 'Vithandrī mähendrī vitathirapi sammīlitha-dhrusā.' No *Indra* survives : it is not one *Indra* but an army of *Indras* close their eyes; they sleep and it is the sleep from which they never awake. The celestials who never close their eyes now have them closed. From the time of creation until the deluge there are many *manvantaras* and for each *manvantara* there is a new *Indra*. That is why the reference to an army of *Indras*, 'Mähendrī vithathih'.

‘Even during this great deluge, your husband sports with you
- ‘*mahāsamhārē asmin viharathi Sathi thvathpathih asau.*’

The *Āchāryā* refers to *Ambāl* here as ‘Sathi’ and the word is used meaningfully. ‘Sathi’ means a lady of supreme chastity, a great *pathivrathā*. Sathi immolated herself in the fire of the sacrifice performed by Daksha when she saw that her husband was not respected at the place and she thought that to continue to live in such a place was sinful. Although she appeared to have perished at the time, she is imperishable, eternal. How can *Brahmasakthi* be otherwise? She who is eternal is Sathi, *pathivrathā*. So her husband also can have no end; he must also be eternal. So it is in keeping with this Sathi’s eternal *saumāngalya* that her husband also is saved from the great deluge.

A similar view is expressed in another stanza 28: in it the *Āchāryā* refers to *Ambāl*’s ‘*thātanka mahimā*’, the greatness of her ear-ornaments ‘*thava janani thātankāmahimā*’ -

Sudhāmapyāsvādhyā prathibhaya jarāmruthyuharinīm
Vipadhyantē viśvē vidhisathamakhādhyā divishadhah
Karālam yakshvēlam kabalithavathah kālakalanā
Na Sambhōsthanmūlam thava janani thātanka-mahimā.

If one swallows poison, especially such a terrible poison as *Kālakūta*, one dies at once. It is our belief that those who have taken amrutha live for ever. But here the story is the reverse. During the time of cosmic dissolution, the celestials who have taken amrutha perish but *Paramēśvarā* alone survives, *Paramēśvarā* who has swallowd the dreadful poison called *Kālakūta* or *Hālāhala*.

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AMBĀL’S SPORT AND IŚVARA AND OTHER DEITIES

An interesting fact here is that there is *Paramēśvarā* by himself on one side and all other deities together on the other. The

same is the case with regard to the worship of *Ambāl*. When you say Mukunda, *Brahmā* and Indra, it means all the rest of the gods also [that is apart from *Śiva*]. All of them worship *Ambāl* placing their crowned heads at her feet. But *Īsvara* alone remains as one who does not worship her. He, the mendicant with matted hair, does not join all those gods wearing crowns. How does *Ambāl* treat those who worship her and the one who does not? It is really strange: the former perish in the deluge while the latter alone remains and remains watching her sport and sporting himself with her.

I must refer to the stanza (29) in which it is said that *Ambāl* rushes to worship the one who does not worship her, tripping upon the crowns of those who adore her. At that moment *Īsvara* happens to return to the scene after a visit to some place. Seeing him from a distance, *Ambāl* is overwhelmed by her wifely devotion and love. Intending to receive him, she rises from her seat and runs up to him. Then her companions warn her to be careful not to trip on the crowns. Without referring to the context in which this incident occurs, the *Āchāryā* begins the stanza with the cautioning words of *Ambāl*'s companions, thereby imparting a dramatic air to his narration.

'Kirītam vairincham parihara':

'Keep away from the crown of Brahmā.'

'Vairincham' means that belonging to *Brahmā*. Among the many names of *Brahmā* the *Āchāryā* has used *'Virinchi'* more often than others. In the very first stanza occurs *'Hari-Hara-Virinchādhi'*. In the next stanza we see *'Virinchiḥ samchinvan'*. While referring to the group of poets (who are unable to describe *Ambāl*'s beauty) he uses the words *'Virinchi-prabhṛuthayah'* (Stanza 12). *'Viśeṣheṇa rinchatḥithi Virinchiḥ'* is the definition of the word. *'Rinchathi'* means creates. Since *Brahmā* performs his function with the distinction that is characteristic of him

(*visēṣhēṇa*) he is 'Virinchi'. Because there is *visēsha* in the name, the *Āchāryā* too has given it a place of *visēsha*.

'Mother, as you walk, keep away from the crown of Virinchi.'

Then *Ambāl*'s companions again caution her: '*Kaitabhabhidah katōre kōtīre skhalasi*.' You are about to trip on the head crown of the one (*Vishṇu*) who split the demon Kaitabha. Be careful.'

When *Vishṇu* was sleeping, Madhu and Kaitabha appeared on the scene to attack *Brahmā* who was residing in the lotus stemming from the navel of *Vishṇu*. *Brahmā* could not himself awaken his father, that is *Vishṇu*. He thrust him into yogic sleep (*yōganidhra*) and prayed to *Ambāl* in the form of Yoganidhra [in one of her aspects]. He adored her with the idea of awakening *Vishṇu* with her blessing. She too, listening to his prayer, removed the *nidhrāsakthi* that had assailed... No.. if I speak thus I wonder whether devotees of *Vishṇu* will be angered. So I will correct myself and say that she removed the *nidhrāsakthi* that had been dependent on *Vishṇu* who, on waking up, slew Madhu and Kaitabha. In our stanza, since the *Āchāryā* happens to mention the name of *Vishṇu*, immediately after that of *Brahmā*, he alludes to the story of Madhu and Kaitabha in order to connect the names of *Brahmā* and *Vishṇu* with that of *Ambāl*. It is the name '*Kaitabhābhid*' for *Vishṇu* that serves the purpose of the allusion.

The *Āchāryā* says that *Vishṇu*'s crown is '*katōra*', that it is hard '*katōre kōtīre*'. '*Kōtira*' means the same as '*kirīta*', crown. In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs the term '*Kuruvindha-mani-srēṇī-kanathkōtīramāṇḍita*': *Ambāl* wears a glittering jewel-encrusted crown. A crown that is '*katōra*' is a solid crown. Why solid crown? An answer to the question is to be found in the *āchāryā*'s *Vishṇupādādhikēśānthā-sthōthra* in which occurs this, '*kruthamakuta-mahādeva-linga-prathishṭhē*'. *Vishṇu* wears a

crown shaped like a *Śivalinga*. A *Śivalinga* will not be fragile but solid.. An interesting point is that without giving a thought as to whether it would be sacrilegious to do so, he places his crowned head at *Ambāl*'s feet. *Ambāl* too is moved by his (*Vishṇu*'s) great devotion to her husband and as she goes to receive him she is about to stumble on the crown. When there is devotion and love welling up nothing will be a sacrilege. *Kaṇṇappa* marked with his shod foot the eye of the *Śivalinga* he had scooped out (to fix his own eye there).

In keeping with the earlier statement about Mukunda, *Brahmā* and Indra performing *nīrājana* to *Ambāl*'s feet with their crowns, here too the *Āchāryā* brings in the name of Indra after those of *Brahmā* and *Vishṇu*: '*Jahi Jambhāri makutam.*' Since Indra killed a demon called *Jambhā* he came to have the name of '*Jambhāri*'. 'Keep away from Indra's crown. Don't trip on it,' *Ambāl*'s companions warn her thus. The *Āchāryā* who sings the praises of *Ambāl*, as if keeping her directly in front of him, says: '*Thava parijanōkthir vijayathē.*' 'The words of your companions, attendants, resound wonderfully.'

It is with a dramatic flourish that the *Āchāryā* mentions first the cautioning by the attendants of *Ambāl*. It is only as he concludes the stanza that he mentions who does the cautioning, *Ambāl*'s companions, attendants. In between he mentions the context which of course is what is important. '*Pratīmrēshu*': as the great celestials (mentioned in the verse) are prostrating themselves before the goddess. Is the context the time of their making obeisance? No. 'Context' means a specific point of time, a particular occasion. The celestials keep prostrating themselves before *Ambāl* all the time: '*Śasvanmukulitha-karōthamśa-makutah,*' so says another stanza (25). Then what is the context here? '*Prasabham upayāthasya bhavanam Bhavasyābhyutthānē*': 'when *Śiva*, that is *Bhava*, returns to your home or *bhavana*.'

‘*Upayātham*’ means return. *Ambāl*’s act of rising from her seat to receive *Paramēśvarā* is expressed by the *Āchāryā* with the word ‘*abhyutthānam*’.

You must have heard the words ‘*abhyutthānam adharmasya*:’ they are spoken by the Lord in the *Gītā* (4. 7):

Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavathi Bhāratha
Abhyutthānam adharmasya thadhātmānam srujāmyaham

‘Whenever dharma declines and whenever there is *abhyutthānam* of adharma, then do I create myself as an *avatāra*,’ says the Lord. Here ‘*abhyutthānam*’ is customarily understood as ‘rising’ based on the connotation of ‘getting up’. In the *Saundaryalaharī* the word has the meaning of ‘rising and meeting to receive’. Can we apply this meaning to the *Gītā* verse (quoted above)? Can we construe that it is adharma that makes the Lord become an *avatāra* on earth? And does it (adharma) go half way to receive the *avatāra*? [The Great Master laughs..] *Rāvānā*, *Kamsa*, *Hiraṇyakaśipu*: was it not their adharma that made the Lord descend to earth, dragged him down here? So if all of us commit a great adharma... [The Gurudeva laughs again...] But what fate awaited them, those who practised adharma, from the hands of the *avatāras*? That should not be forgotten...

The *Āchāryā* refers to the excitement caused by the return home of *Īśvara* as ‘*prasabham*’: it means flurry of movement. It was during this time, when *Ambāl* rises from her seat and rushes to receive her husband, that her attendants warn her not to trip over the crowns of the celestials.

All those who worship at her feet are made to perish by *Ambāl* in the great deluge, but there is one on seeing whom she rushes, wanting to fall at his feet, and he is saved by her, he alone in fact.

Is it right on the part of *Ambāl* to let down those who fall at her feet? But do they in fact perish in the great deluge? Only their bodies are destroyed. Their life? It mingles with *Ambāl*'s and becomes one with it. What more is there, what more is to be expected? Having regard to the requirements of poetry and the poet's genius, it is said that all perish but that *Īśvara* alone remains because of *Ambāl*'s *Pāthivrathya* and *saumāṅgalya*.

It is because of her *pāthivrathya* and *saumāṅgalya* that, when the bodies of all other deities perish, nothing happens to *Īśvara* even physically: his body too is eternal. His life and *Ambāl*'s life are one. Even when they seem to be separate, the life individually of the two becomes one great single life. Outwardly, as two embodied entities, they are husband and wife, and even in this aspect of *Īśvara* no injury is done to his body during the time of the universal destruction.

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THE SPORT OF PROTECTION AND PUNISHMENT

It was not during the time of universal dissolution alone that there was danger to the lives of the celestials; during the churning of the ocean for amrutha too they felt threatened. Before the ambrosia came up the terrible poison called *Kālakūta* emerged spreading fire and threatening to burn everything in its flames. The celestials had not invited *Īśvara* to partake of the nectar that was to arise eventually. But now that their lives were endangered they rushed to him, crying for help. *Īśvara* did not ask them: 'Ah, you knew the way to my place only now?' Out of his great compassion he made that *Kālakūta* poison into a ball and swallowed it at one gulp as an act of sacrifice.

The *Śāsthras* have it that one who is a true 'prabhu', 'yajamāna' or 'lord' has two functions to perform: protection and

punishment. He has to protect those who are under him and punish them when they commit a wrong. The same can be applied to a government. Hospitals, schools, the P.W.D.-these are part of the system to afford protection and sustenance to people. Similarly, more important than these, are the law-courts and the police department to administer justice and award punishment to offenders.

The *Śiva-Ambāl* pair conduct their sport of protection and punishment in an interesting manner and it takes many different forms.

During the sacrifice conducted by Daksha, *Śiva* punished the celestials since they had watched with indifference *Ambāl* giving up her body [in the sacrificial fire]. The goddess who sacrificed herself later became the cause of saving these very celestials in her new *avatāra* of *Himavān*'s daughter. *Śiva* begot a son by her who became the commander of the celestial forces and saved them, the *dēvas*, by slaying the demon who had threatened their very existence. The celestials had a role in the story of his birth in that they created the circumstances leading to the marriage of *Śiva* and *Pārvathī*.

When *Yāma* cast his noose round *Mārkaṇḍēya* along with the *Sivalinga* he was clasping, *Ambāl* the *pathivrathā*, her wrath aroused, burst out: 'What, the noose of *Yāma* has become the noose for my *Swāmī*?' And it was indeed she who punished the god of death. This is referred to in the account of how *Śiva* kicked *Yāma* with his left foot. This is the story of *Kāla*, that is *Yāma*. As for the story of *Kāma*, he was reduced to ashes by the fire from the eye in *Śiva*'s forehead. Half of that eye belongs to *Ambāl* who is the left side of *Śiva*. So in meting out punishment to *Kāma* she had half a share. But later, all by herself, without any part played by *Śiva*, she saved *Kāma*, giving him new life. She also imparted to him the power to achieve victory over *Swāmī*, that is *Īśvarā*. She has in a

veiled manner even punished *Śiva*. A work called *Kāmākshi Vilāsam* mentions this. Here, in the *Saundaralahari* stanza which speaks of the greatness of *Ambālī*'s *thātanka*, a wonderful example is given of the protection afforded by a prabhu: it is that of *Śiva* saving the celestials by swallowing the *Kālākūta* poison. We are also reminded of the fact that *Śiva* was at the time saved by *Ambālī* herself.

The *purāṇic* story is that *Ambālī* gently holds *Śiva* by his throat and prevents the poison from going into his stomach. Does this mean that the *Kālākūta* poison will not do any harm if it remains in the throat and does not go further down the body? Is not its very smell lethal?

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AMBĀLĪ: THE MEDICINE THAT GIVES LIFE TO ĪŚA

The truth behind the *purāṇic* story [referred to in the previous chapter] is to be found in the *Vēdhās* themselves. There is a medicine called *Śiva*. It is a universal remedy '*visva bhēshajī*'. It is a medicine not only for all afflictions of mankind, it is a remedy for that affliction which is the cause of all afflictions, '*bhavarōga*' or the disease called birth. Is that all? It is indeed a medicine for *Śiva* himself. '*Rudrasya bhēshajī*,' so proclaims the *Vēdhās*. We chant this '*Sri Rudra manthra*' every day, performing *abhishēka* to Rudra.

'O *Paramēśvarā*, if you continue to live even after swallowing the *Kālākūta* poison, who administered you the medicine for it [the antidote]? Don't think I do not know that secret. I am going to proclaim it to everyone as a manthra,' so Mother *Vēdhā* (*Vēdhamāthā*) seems to say with a dramatic, poetic, air in the '*Sri Rudra Praśna*'. What is that secret? How is it proclaimed by Mother *Vēdhā* as if speaking to the Lord himself?

‘O Lord, you possess two bodies. Now you are seen in the body of Rudra. When we say ‘*Raudrākāram*’ [raudra or terrible in appearance] the world trembles. You appear in such a body as would make the world tremble. I have ‘advertised’ it as ‘*ghōra*’ [terrible] or ‘*ghōratharam*’ [more terrible than what is usually considered terrible]’. Yet one like you has the utterly auspicious name of *Śiva*. It is so because you have another physique that is auspicious to the highest degree.’

[The Gurudeva who was speaking the words of *Vedhamāthā* now says in his own words.]

What is present in the dualistic world, whether called good or bad, is the form of *Īśvara*. In our religion there is no distinction made between the two: God for the good and Satan for the bad or evil. It is the same *Īśvara* that appears as *Sambhāra*-Rudra (Rudra the destroyer) and as *Śiva*, the serene one, unequalled in giving his blessings.

We make a distinction between a ‘*ghōra mūrthi*’ (a god of terrible aspect) and a beautiful *mūrthi*. ‘*ghōra*’ implies not only wrathfulness but suffering and all other evils; and by beautiful we understand all that is good, including serenity, love and happiness. From our experience of life we feel there is more bad or evil than good in the world.. That is why great men called worldly existence ‘*ghōra samsāra*’. But it is not all *ghōra* because here and there and now and then we see in it the silver lining of tranquillity, happiness and beauty. Like medicine for disease there is relief given by *Śiva* for what is *ghōra*. That life is a mixture of good and bad is the resolve of the *Paramāthmā*. We may take it that the bad element predominates because only then will we endeavour to be freed from the world and reach the state beyond good and evil and realise the *Āthmā*. We cannot say with certainty that ‘this’ or ‘that’ is the purpose of creation. That is why I used the words, ‘we may take it’. Though evil predominates, the will of the

Paramāthmā is not to make the world altogether bad. When we say 'misra' (mixture) how can it be altogether bad? Like medicine for an ailment there is *Śiva* as a remedy for the terrible world. A disease is not totally cured; if it were so the world would be altogether good. By feeding a man once, his hunger is not banished for all time. You are hungry and when you are fed your hunger is appeased for the time being. When you feel hungry again you have to eat again. Similarly, for a terrible disease *Śivam* administers a medicine... What is that medicine? The *Vēdhās* call it '*Śiva*'.

'Lord, do you know the medicine that has transformed your terrible body into an auspicious (*Śiva*) one? Make the second syllable of the name '*Śiva*' long, and you get '*Śivā*' and that is the medicine. The *Paramāthmā* is the root of all bodies and in it there is the element of motherliness, love that is utterly auspicious. It is that *Śiva*, the medicine that has pacified what is terrible about you and made you *Śiva*,' so says the *Śruthi* (that is the *Vēdhās*).

The *Vēdhās* do not stop with saying that *Ambāl* is the medicine for the suffering of all of us caught in this world. They do not stop with saying that she is '*visvasya bhēshajī*' ('medicine for the world'). She sees to it that the raudra rasa (the terrible mood) does not preponderate in the Primordial Entity that conducts the cosmic drama; she appeases It with '*karuṇā rasa*' (the mood of compassion). So do the *Vēdhās* state.

When we understand the meaning of '*Śivā*' as the wife of *Śiva*, the implication is that *Śiva* is by nature auspicious and that *Śivā* is a name she acquired by virtue of her being *Śiva*'s wife, that is without our inquiring into her own nature or qualities. But the *Vēdhās* have a different story to tell. They have it that it is by the medicine of *Śivā* administered to him that Rudra becomes *Śiva*. That Rudra has an auspicious physique is denoted by the term '*Śivā-thanu*', that is by using the feminine form of the term and not the masculine form, '*Śiva thanu*'. That means the thanu or body of

Śiva was caused by the motherly disposition (motherliness) of *Śivā*. The body is in the form of the father but the disposition, the inner character, is that of the mother. We call a medicinal herb '*mūlikā*' in the feminine gender. By taking it a woman can give birth to a male child also, cannot she? It is similar to that, to say that Rudra's body was transformed into that of *Śiva* by the '*Śivā* medicine' and that that transformed body is '*Śivā-thanu*'. '*Bhēshajī*' is also in the feminine gender. Instead of using the word in the neuter gender as '*bhēshajam*', the feminine form is used here to bring in the motherly mind or attitude.

After the physique of *Śiva* assumed the masculine form, half of his body became *Ambāl* in physical form also, so as to manifest both Mother and Father in one body.

Śivā first came as a medicine for *Śiva*'s natural wrathfulness. Compassion or *karuṇā* welled up in him because of it and he swallowed the *Kālakūta* poison to save the celestials. Now by becoming mingled with him as a medicine, *Ambāl* (or *Śivā*) saved him from disease or injury likely to be caused by that poison that came from outside.

It would be enough for people to be blessed with the sidelong glance of *Ambāl*; they will not meet with an untimely death. That being so how can any poison cause injury to the Lord when *Ambāl* resides in him, pouring out her compassion and occupying half his body? How can the deluge, ordinary or great, be a threat to his life? According to the *Āchāryā*, there is no '*kālakalanā*' (counting of years) for *Īśvarā*. He is not bound by time; nor has he any end in time. He is '*Kālakāla*' [the Death of time or of Death] and for that reason known as '*Mrutyunjaya*'. We chant the *Mrutyunjaya* manthra for health and long life. The one who has triumphed over death, how can he ever die? She who accomplished his victory over death with her left foot makes him immortal by being with him.

It was to make people aware that *Śiva* was saved from the poison because of his being inseparably united with *Ambāl* that she stopped the venom from going further down from the throat. The fact is even if the poison had gone into his stomach it could not have affected him since he was protected by her. But it was because people should know the importance of wifely loyalty, the greatness of *Ambāl*, her love for her husband, that she stopped the poison in his throat for all to see.

‘The fire emanating from the (*Kālakūta*) poison must have blazed all round, striking terror into the hearts of the celestials. How could you remain gazing at such a fire and not keep your eyes closed? Not only did you keep looking at the fire, you made the poison emitting the flames into a ball. What was it for you, a rose apple? Not only did you look at the fiery poison and roll it into a ball with your hand... What was so blue and like a corrugating rose apple you swallowed at one gulp? Was that rose apple one of those amazing pills prepared by siddhas? ‘Keep it under your tongue. You can fly in space,’ siddhas give you pills and tell you what [miracles] they can accomplish. Did the *Kālakūta* poison seem to you like one of those pills? Even to look at it is to burn your eyes but still you put it in your mouth...’ I am quoting from *Śivānadalahari*. While mentioning the ‘siddha pill’ the *Āchāryā* must have been reminded of the pills prescribed in the siddha system of medicine. Also he must have been reminded of the ‘*Śivābheshajī*’ of the ‘Rudra’ hymn and he must have addressed thus *Śiva*, connecting the two. Along with it we come to have a beautiful reason for *Ambāl* having stopped the poison in *Śiva*’s throat. ‘You saw (the poison), you took it and you put it into your mouth. Did you stop with that... What you put into your mouth you brought further down into your throat. Tell me, did you do so because of your desire to have an ornament for your throat with a blue jewel in it?’ the *Āchāryā* asks thus: ‘Vadha’ (‘tell me’), he says to the Lord concluding the verse.

The Lord has no desire of any kind. So he would not have longed for anything to wear as an ornament. But *Ambāl* perhaps may have wished to adorn her husband's white-complexioned throat with a blue stone. She could have by her mere wish or resolve or by the mere touch of her hand removed any trace of the poison swallowed by *Īsvara* but, instead of doing so, she made it shine like a sapphire on her husband's neck which is beautiful like a conch-shell. *Ambāl* is eternal, a *pathivrathā* also, and an everlasting sumangali. So she has made *Paramēśvarā* also eternal; he cannot be destroyed in any deluge. If *Ambāl* is eternal she must be superior to the amrutha taken by the celestials, the ambrosia brought up during the churning of the ocean. The reason is that even those who had taken it could not escape the great dissolution. After all, *Ambāl*'s world is surrounded by an ocean of nectar-the amrutha in it is more plentiful than water. She must have been made of something superior to, higher than, amrutha.

That something is chith, consciousness, chaitanya, the very essence of life. The amrutha from the ocean of milk cannot save one during the deluge; true amrutha is that which protects one eternally. That is why *Ambāl* is called 'Amrutha-chaitanya-mūrthi'. Even the amrutha got from the ocean of milk is superior to all medicines - it is customary to say so. The present stanza contains the phrase, '*jarā-mruthyu-harini*'; '*jarā*' is old age. What is the use of living long, undergoing suffering and without being able to hear, or to walk? Death is better than such a life. That is why amrutha itself prevents old age and death and (as said before) it is superior to all other medicines known to us. What, then, about 'amrutha-chaitanya'? It must surely be superior to the other amrutha. *Ambāl* is that amrutha-chaitanya personified, the embodiment of a sovereign universal remedy, '*visva bhēshajī*'. When she is in the left-hand side of the Lord how can he ever perish?

We often speak of '*thāli (mangalsūthra) bhāgyam*'. When a man survives a serious accident or comes through a dread disease we speak of his wife's *thāli bhāgyam*. It is because of the *thāli (mangalsūthra) bhāgyam* of *Ambāl* that *Īśvara* escaped the great deluge and remained unhurt even after swallowing the *Kālakūta* poison.

AMBĀL'S THĀTANKA

This '*thāli bhāgyam*' is also called *Ambāl's* '*thātanka mahimā*', i.e. the greatness, the glory, of her *thātankas* [ear-ornaments], says the *Āchāryā*.

If the *Vēdhās* are called *Śruthi*, the *Dharmasāsthras* that the seers have composed and the *Gītā* that *Krishṇa Paramāthmā* has taught come under *Smruthi*. The teachings of the *Āchāryā* may also be included in *Smruthi*. The *Vēdhic* utterance, that *Ambāl* is medicine to the Lord, is given here by the *Āchāryā* as a *Smruthi* statement. Instead of literally copying the *Vēdhic* utterance, which would not be satisfying to our aesthetic sense, he says here, incorporating a novel poetic fancy, that it is the symbol of *Ambāl's* *saumāngalya*, her *thātanka*, that protects her husband.

Interestingly enough, this *thātanka* is also a *thāli*. I am repeating what *Kālidāsa* has said in one of his poems. '*Thāli-palāsa-thātankam*': these are the words used by the poet. '*Thāla*' or '*thāli*' means the palm-tree. '*Palāsa*' is the flame of the forest. But it also means a leaf, any leaf. '*Thālipalāsa*' means palm-leaf. In olden times when people lived a simple unostentatious life, the pendant of a woman's *maṅgalyasūthra* and her ear-ornaments were made of the palm-leaf, both denoting auspiciousness. That is how the bit of palm-leaf used as the pendant of the *maṅgalyasūthra* came to be called '*thāli*' [in the South]. I have seen peasant women, even today, wearing such palm-leaf ear-ornaments. Until in later

times when life became ostentatious, all women, including those belonging to the Brahmin community, wore the palm-leaf ear-ornaments. Why, according to *Kālidāsa*, *Parāsakthi* herself wears the same.

Even in these days of ostentation and vanity, during the *pūjā* performed to *Ambāl* we give sumangalis small black beads and green palm-leaf that the goddess wears.

That *thālī* is derived from *thāla* (palm) is clear enough. The word '*thātanka*', ear-ornament, is also derived from it. '*Thāda*' is another form of the word '*thāla*'. '*Anka*' means a mark. So *thātanka* is an auspicious mark made of *thāda*. This ornament is also called '*thādapatra*'; it means the same as '*thālīpalāśa*'. '*Thādanka*' later became '*thātanka*'. It seems *thātanka* is made up of an ear-stud and an ear-ring.

Thālī and the ear-ornament are important in denoting *saumāṅgalya*. When a woman ceases to be a sumangali [that is on her husband's death] she is divested of her *thālī* and ear-ornaments. A man's long life, his surviving a threat to his life, is attributed to his wife's *thālī-bhāgyam*. In the same way we can, with equal reason, use the term '*thātanka bhāgyam*': that is what the *Āchāryā* calls '*thātanka mahimā*'. 'All the celestials who shared amrutha perished. But your husband who swallowed the entire poison (without it being shared by others) is not destroyed. It is due to the greatness of your *thātanka*, Mother,' says the *Āchāryā* ('Thava janani *thātanka-mahimā*.')

The ear has a special importance among the five sense-organs. It is the ear that grasps the sounds originating in space which has a high place among the *Panchabhūthas* (five elements). Is it not because all the *Vedhās* were grasped by the ear that they are called '*Śruthi*'? It is the ear that receives all teaching, all instruction. Although *Ambāl* is a guru herself she learned all the

Āgamas and manthras at the feet of Īśvarā, her husband as well as her guru - and she learned by listening. Above all, is it not with her ears that she listens to all our prayers, all the songs we sing in her praise?

This may be the reason why our Āchāryā is particularly devoted and attached to Ambāl's thātanka. She is called 'Śarvamangalā' and the thātanka is her auspicious mark. In the *Sahasranāmam* it is stated that the sun and the moon are her two thātankas: 'Thātanka-yugalī-bhūtha-thapanōdhupa-mandalā'. The Āchāryā states in the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 34) that the same sun and moon are our Mother's two breasts that give us milk. The thātankas are thus a sign of the *saumāngalya* of *Paramēśvarā*'s wife as well as a mark of the affection of our Mother who suckles us, her children. The power of the deity, Akhilandesvari, in *Jambukēśvaram*, became too fierce to be borne by people. In order to appease the goddess, the Āchāryā made *Śrīchakras* (two of them) in the form of thātankas, drew the excess power of the deity into them and fixed them to her ears. *Kānchīpuram* is a prthivi *kshētra* and is the centre of the earth. Here too the power of *Kāmākshi*, the deity, became immeasurably great and unbearable. The Āchāryā installed the *Śrīchakra* in the space in front of her to appease her. This was towards the end of his life. *Jambukēśvaram* is an ap-*kshētra*, but can the *Śrīchakra* for that reason be installed in the *Kāvēri*? [The *Kāvēri* flows past the temple of *Jambukēśvaram*.] Not only in the water, the *Śrīchakra* cannot be installed in thejas, vāyu and ākāśa also. Since it is possible to instal it only in the earth the Āchāryā did so in *Kānchī*. What did he do in *Jambukēśvaram*? He thought that Ambāl's auspicious *Śiva*-consciousness should swell over the *Kāvēri* and also that her breast milk should flow in abundance out of her motherly affection for all of us, her children. The thātanka is a common mark or symbol of both and he had the *Śrīchakra* absorbed in it and fixed the same in the ear of the goddess Akhilandesvari - thus the act satisfying the

purpose of a yanthra as well as of an ornament. Just as the *Saundaryalaharī* is both a thanthra *sāsthra* and a work of poetry that proclaims the beauty of *Ambāl*, so the *thātankas* serve two purposes: they protect people according to the canonical texts and at the same time are adornments for *Ambāl*. In fact the *thātanka* 'beautifies the beauty of *Ambāl*'.

There are said to be *Śrīchakra* and *Śivachakra thātankas*. Of the nine avaranas in the *Śrīchakra* four belong to *Śiva* (*Śivachakras*) and five to *Ambāl*. This is mentioned in an earlier stanza (11) of our hymn: '*Chathurbhih Śrīkantaiḥ Sivāyuvathibhih Panchabhirapi*.' Here *Śiva* is referred to as '*Śrīkanta*' and *Ambāl* as '*Śivayuvathī*' and this is in keeping with the theme of the greatness of the *thātanka*. *Śrīkanta* is *Nīlakanta*. Poison is also known as '*Śrī*'; hence *Nīlakanta* becomes *Śrīkanta*. In the stanza dealing with the *thātanka*, the *Āchāryā* speaks of the wonderful phenomenon of one who has swallowed poison remaining imperishable. That *Ambāl* has an appellation in which her husband's name occurs - *Śivayuvathī* - shows her *saumāngalya* and also the fact that she is not fierce [this is denoted by the '*Śiva*' in the name] and that she is disposed to grant her blessings.

The *Vedhās* refer to her as '*Rudrasya bhēshajī*'. During the *āchāryā*'s time her power had become unbearable to people. Actually, one must say that the power had not increased but that in the age of Kali people had become too weak to withstand the full impact of the vital power of the idols installed. When we are weak in body and are unable to digest healthy and nutritious food we find that gruel suits us better. *Ambāl*'s power to bless itself had to be diluted for the world to bear it. It was then that the *Āchāryā* drew the extra power of *Ambāl* into the *Śrīchakra-thātanka* and made it an ornament for her.

In the story told in the stanza of *Śiva* swallowing the poison, *Ambāl* is mentioned as having made the deadly poison an

ornament for his throat, the throat of one who was the root from which the *Āchāryā* had sprung. As for the *Āchāryā* himself, he made *Ambāl*'s fierce power or what seemed her fierce power to people in their weakened state-an ornament.

If the mark or sign of 'something', any entity, is not regarded merely as a symbol but etched deeply in the mind - particularly in the minds of great men, of seers and so on - that mark goes to strengthen that original 'something'. If harm is done to that mark, harm will be done to what it represents. It is so because the mark or sign itself acquires a vital power. *Upavītha* or the sacred thread is a mark of *Brahmaṇyam*: if it is worn *Brahmaṇyam* increases and if it gets cut or if it is lost we feel as if we have acquired some impurity and that *Gāyathrī* itself will be dimmed. The same is the case with the signs cherished by the great seers or by the common people. The national flag is a symbol. If any disrespect is shown it we feel disturbed. If it gets severed from the mast we feel there is truly danger to the land. Even in this age of rationalism there are laws that lay down punishment for those who show disrespect to the national flag or to the Constitution. The Bible, is a symbol. But, believing that it strengthens the will of people to go on the right path, the American President holds it in his hand when he is sworn in. Consider the faith atheists have in black or black-and-red and the mental strength they derive from the same: they are prepared to lay down their lives for it. It is doubtful whether we who call ourselves theists have the same faith in the signs and symbols of our religion or whether we derive any mental strength from them.

I wanted to say that a sign or mark which stands for a thing can cause good or bad to it. It is the same with the *thātanka*. If the husband has come to harm, the *thātanka* has to be removed and if the *thātanka* does not come down it means the husband is safe. At her marriage, *Ambāl* must have worn the *thātanka*. She and the

Lord must have looked upon it as a sign of *saumāṅgalya*. Then how much power and value it must have gained? If *Ambāl* is the protector of the life of *Īśvara*, the *thātanka* is the protector of her *saumāṅgalya*. It acquires a life and strength of its own and protects *Ambāl*. Will she be ever divested of that protection? Never. It will never lose its place as the protector of her *saumāṅgalya*. When it refuses to leave her and remains with her, the Lord, her husband, will not come to any harm from anything, whether it be poison or the great deluge. This is *thātanka mahimā*, the greatness of *thātanka*, that the *Āchāryā* speaks about.

Ultimately, all *mahimā*, all glory or greatness, belongs to *Ambāl* who is the source of all *śakthi*, all power. It is she who gives each object the quality that is distinctive to it. Whatever there is regarded as great, that is 'mama tejō' *mśa-sambhavam* (arising as an aspect of my strength)', says *Krishṇa Paramāthmā*. The *Āchāryā* also says, '*Thava janani thātanka mahimā*' - 'Mother, it is all the glory of your *thātanka*.'

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WHY VISHṆU IS LEFT OUT

Brahmā and *Indra* and indeed all denizens of the celestial world perish [in the great deluge]: '*Vipadhyanthē viśvē Vidhi-Śāthamakhādhyā dhivishadah*' (Stanza 28). '*Vidhi*' is *Brahmā*, '*Sathamakhan*' is one who has performed a hundred horse sacrifices, that is *Indra*. Earlier, '*Mukunda-Brahmā-Indra*' were mentioned; which means *Vishṇu* was also included among those who performed *nirājana* to *Ambāl* with their crowns. In that context *Rudra* was left out. Here, among those destroyed during the great dissolution the name of *Vishṇu* is omitted. In an earlier stanza (26) in which occur the words, '*mahā-samhare asmin*', the *Āchāryā* has given a list of those who perish in the *mahā-samhāra* and says: '*Harirāpnōthi virathim*', i.e. '*Mahāvishṇu* comes to an

end.' But here (Stanza 28) Hari is not mentioned. Perhaps the *Āchāryā* was reluctant to speak again and again of *Ambāl*'s brother *Vishṇu* perishing.

Not that alone. The reference here is to the celestials who partook of the divine ambrosia: '*Sudhāmapyāsvādhyadhivishadah.*' There is no help that *Mahāvishṇu* did not render those performing the amrutha-mathana, the churning of the ocean for ambrosia. It was in fact he who suggested to the celestials (*dēvas*) that by taking the amrutha churned out from the ocean they could remain deathless. Then he too joined in the endeavour. When the Mandhara mountain, which was being used as the churning rod, got loosened from the churning rope it was he who took the Tortoise incarnation and supported the mountain on his back to make it steady. When, in the end, amrutha appeared he it was who brought it from under the ocean in a pot, taking the form of Dhanvantari. *Vishṇu* also assumed the form of *Mohini*, the Enchantress, and saw to it that the asuras were denied the elixir and that the *dēvas* alone got it. It was also he who distributed it to them. So it is clear that he himself did not sit in the row of those who partook of the ambrosia. He distributed it to all but did not himself have it. In the *Bhāgavatam* it is mentioned that he did not consume the amrutha. That is why his name is not included in the stanza.

Ambāl being an eternal sumangali her husband *Paramasiva* is not included among those who perish in the deluge. Rudra, *Mahēśvara*, *Sadāsiva*, *Kāmēśvarā* - they are also not added to the 'list' of those who die since they are always thought of in association with *Paramasiva*. The *Āchāryā* is particularly careful about cherishing the eternal and auspicious beauty of the Mother who protects *Śiva* (he himself has a name meaning Mangala) by remaining an everlasting sumangali.

THE THEFT COMMITTED BY AMBĀL

The *Vēdhās* proclaim that of the two bodies of *Śiva* called '*Śiva thanu*', one is entirely *Ambikā*'s. In the *Ardhanārīśvara* form *Ambāl* and *Śiva* are half and half in one body. The *Āchāryā* integrates the two views in a stanza and charges *Ambāl* with having committed theft (Stanza 23). *Śiva* and *Śakthi* seem to be separate as well as united together, they seem to be two separate entities bodily as well as one entity bodily. Despite these images of the two, the supreme truth is that they are always one inseparable Reality, one Chaitanya (life force). The two being separate individually; the two being half and half of one body; *Śiva* being a linga and *Ambāl* entwining round him in the form of a serpent; he as *Dakṣināmūrthi*, retaining her within himself without revealing her outwardly, and he remaining all by himself - and against all these is *Durgā*. Each form represents a concept, a truth. The concepts or truths are told as stories. Poets play with such concepts or even apparently ridicule them. It is in this manner that the *Āchāryā* has spoken of *Ambāl* as a 'thief'. It is a big theft she has committed. 'She has stolen her husband's entire body. Is not stolen property kept hidden? Thus *Ambāl* has concealed, her husband's body in her. Not only is she guilty of stealing it, she has swallowed the property stolen!'

*Thvayā hruthvā vāmam vapur-aparithrupthēna manasā
Śārīrārdham Śambhōr-aparamapi sankē hruthamabhūth
Yadhēthath thvadrūpam sakalamaruṇābham thrinayanam
Kuchābhyāmānamram kutila-sasichūdālamakutam*

'*Thvayā hruthvā*': at the very start of the stanza *Ambāl* is charged with theft.

'*Thvayā*' = by you; '*vāmam vapuh*': the left side of *Śiva*'s body, '*hruthvā*' = has been stolen. You may construe the same from the context as 'after having stolen'. 'Mother, even after the

left side of *Paramēśvarā*'s body having been stolen....' What is meant by 'even after'? '*Aparithrupthēna manasā*' = with a mind not fully satisfied : you were not fully satisfied even after having stolen half of *Śiva*'s body. '*Śambhōh aparam sarīrārdham api hrutham abhūth*' = the other half of *Śiva*'s body was also stolen. 'Not satisfied with stealing one half of *Śiva*'s body, you stole the other half also.'

Instances of verbal play abound in the hymns composed by the *Āchāryā*. Here, in the first line, there is 'apari' in the compound word. '*Aparithrupthēna*'; 'vapuh' + '*Aparithrupthēna*' = '*vapura-parithrupthēna*'. In the next line we have '*Śambhōraparam*'. There is 'aparam' in this : '*Śambhōh aparam*'. But 'apari' and 'aparam' have different meanings. '*Pūrṇam*'- '*paripūrṇam*': the usage is like '*thyāgam*' '*parithyāgam*'. The prefix 'pari' reinforces the meaning of the word of which it is the prefix. So to make 'thrupthi' (satisfaction) whole we have 'parithrupthi'. The opposite of 'parithrupthi' is 'aparithrupthi'. 'By stealing half the body (of *Śiva*) how can you be wholly satisfied? You were only half satisfied.' With this inner meaning, the *Āchāryā* says, 'With a mind not fully satisfied' : '*aparithrupthēna manasā*.' 'Aparam' in '*sarīrārdham aparam*' means the other, that is the other half of the body.

It is well known that *Ambālī* is only the left side of *Śiva*'s body. That is how the *Āchāryā* was expecting to see *Śiva*, as *Ardhanārīśvara*. But what did he actually see? 'I am going to see Mother and Father, together, half and half (half of Mother and half of Father).' But what he saw was entirely the Mother, that is including the '*dakṣiṇa bhāga*', the right side. Father is all white, bright like pure crystal, Mother is red, so he had heard. So together they must be half white and half red. If she were *Ardhānganī* it must be like that. But the form the *Āchāryā* saw was different. This is how he describes it: '*sakalam aruṇābham*' = 'all

red in radiance.' One half of the side, which should be masculine, is it flat-chested? No. '*Kuchābhyam ānamram*'. Mother alone is seen, not Father. [The *Mahāguru* makes a gesture similar to that a child makes when it says, 'Father not seen.'] The Father's side of the body is also Mother.

Ardhanārīśvara is one of the many divine manifestations. *Śiva* and *Ambāl* have many other manifestations, aspects, in which each is independent of the other as in these pairs: *Paramasiva-Pārvathī*, *Nataraja-Śivakāmasundarī* and *Kāmēśvarā-Kāmēśvarī*, the last-mentioned belonging to our subject, *Śrīvidhya*. In the pair, *Kāmēśvarā-Kāmēśvarī*, *Ambāl*'s importance is diminished. (We have already dealt with this matter.) She, *Kāmēśvarī*, gives *dharṣan* alone. This is the case in *Kāñchīpuram* itself. However, the *Āchāryā* pretends ignorance about such matters: he pretends to know only one manifestation in which Father and Mother are the two halves of one body. It is all for the purpose of the *nindhāsthuthi* of *Ambāl* and of charging her with theft.

The *Āchāryā* saw that the right side also belonged to Mother. If a man got half a kingdom he would not be satisfied with it and would try to seize the other half also. If one has nothing one will have no such urge. The Lord is so noble that in an act of generosity for which there is no parallel he gave half his body to his spouse *Ambāl*. And the consequence of it was that she seized the other half of his body also, so it must have occurred to the *Āchāryā*. But did the idea in fact occur to him? It was for amusement, to make fun of *Ambāl*, and it was all pretence.

Half thief, three-quarters thief, whole thief, so goes a saying. The half thief (female) here became full thief. And not an ordinary thief. She stole the body of one who was no other than her husband, *Paramēśvarā*, so thinks the *āchāryā*.

'*Thaskarānām pathī*' (chief of thieves): this is what the *Vēdhās* themselves call *Paramēśvarā*. What thaskaram, what theft,

did he commit? The child Sambandham (*Tamil Śaiva Saint*) answers the question in his very first song: 'one who steals the heart'. *Ambāl* is the thief who stole the body of this other thief who steals our hearts, so states the *Āchāryā*.

But we must not make a statement in the form of a judgement that he committed theft. 'The matter relates to a very, very high quarter. So we must not get into trouble by making a pronouncement in the form of verdict.' How do political leaders, even though free to say anything, respond to questions put to them by newspapermen? They take a noncommittal attitude to issues on which they are questioned. 'Why should we say anything that is likely to get us into trouble?' such is their approach. We often read in the papers of a politician 'parrying a question'. An accused who is known to be guilty is referred to as an alleged offender until the court decides that he is really a culprit. The *Āchāryā* also thinks that he should be guarded in making a statement [about the theft he thinks *Ambāl* has committed].

'*Śārīrārdham Śambhōraparamapi hrutamabhūt.*' The *Āchāryā* does not say definitely that 'the other half of *Paramēśvarā*'s body was also stolen by you'. Instead he says: '*Śārīrārdham Śambhōraparamapi sankē hruthamabhūth.*' He has added the word '*sankē*' in between. It means 'I suspect', 'I have a doubt', 'I wonder whether....' 'I wonder whether the other half also has been stolen by you.' The *Āchāryā* has made a tactful statement. He has done so because to raise a doubt about someone's action is to make a deeper impression on people about it than to pass a judgement on the same. If we point a finger at a man and say that he is a confirmed culprit, the matter will end there. Nobody will think about it again. But if we label a man a 'suspicious character', it will lead to a whole lot of conjecture about him and people will tend to think that he is really a guilty person. Since it will be a conclusion arrived at on one's own, it will

be well etched in one's mind. Without giving his verdict that *Ambāl* has committed a theft and making himself liable to the charge of his having committed a sacrilege, the *Āchāryā* has cleverly provoked people into believing that *Ambāl* has in fact committed a theft. In poetry a fact should not be bluntly stated and there must be a mere hint of what the poet wants to convey. That is why the *Āchāryā* uses the word '*sanke*' in the stanza.

'*Sanke*', 'I suspect': if you say so you must have your reasons, is it not so? Without any *prima facie* evidence can you suspect anyone of having committed an offence, that too one like *Parāśakthi* herself, and call her a thief?

The *Āchāryā* mentions a number of reasons. The divine form he saw was entirely red in colour. We noted one of the reasons already mentioned: both sides of the chest of the form he saw had the characteristic of a woman. But how can that be enough? *Ambāl* can be suspected to have committed a theft only if she had something that belonged to *Śiva*. A man accused of theft can be charge-sheeted only if he has in possession part of the stolen property. If the form seen by the *Āchāryā* was entirely that of *Ambāl*, it is likely that the left side of the form that is her own could have grown to cover the right side also to become a full female figure. Similarly, *Śiva*'s right side could have grown to extend to the left for the whole body to become a male figure. When the *Āchāryā* had *dharsan*, the Lord might have gone out somewhere. Altogether unless *Ambāl* had in her possession something specifically belonging to *Śiva* she could not be accused of theft.

The *Āchāryā* was not unaware of such reasoning. It was after seeing *Ambāl* with two parts associated with *Śiva* that he became suspicious of her. What were the two parts? One was '*thrinayanam*' and the second '*kutilasasichūdālamakutam*'. 'The *thrinayanam*' (three eyes) must be known to all.

'*Kutīlāsasichūdālamakutam*' means the crown with the crescent moon. The one with the three eyes is *Chandramaulīsvara*. Are not the three eyes and the crescent-moon adornment distinctive characteristics of *Śiva*? The *Vēdhās* refer to him as 'Thrayambaka' and it means one with three eyes. The dhyāna-sloka recited during *Rudrābhishēka* has this; '*Jyōthi-sphātika-linga-mauli-vilāsath-pūrttēndhu*'. Here the moon adorning *Śiva*'s head is mentioned. The form referred to is the crystal linga. In this form the head is adorned by the full moon. When the same deity has a face, eyes, ears and so on the moon adorning the head or crown is the crescent moon, not the full moon.

The three eyes and the crescent moon belong to *Paramasīva*. But during his *dharṣan* the *Āchāryā* saw these with *Ambāl*. This surely meant that she had stolen *Śiva*. She could be charge-sheeted on the basis of this. And though the *Āchāryā* uses the word '*sanka*' the reasons he gives for his suspicion are so strong as to make us pronounce the verdict that she is indeed a thief.

During the time of his worship, *Ambāl* manifested herself to the *Āchāryā* as *Kāmēsvārī*, the deity of *Saundaryalaharī*. *Kāmēsvārī* has the forehead eye, that is she has three eyes in all. '*Sakalam aruṇābham*', the form mentioned here is entirely red, and the same as '*Sindūrāruṇavigrahām*' occurring at the beginning of the *Lalitha-Sahasranāmam* '*Sindūrāruṇa-vigrahām thrinayanam*'. The same is seen as '*Sakalamaruṇābham thrinayanam*' in the *Saundaryalaharī*. Although the *Āchāryā* speaks in his hymn of *Ambāl*'s red complexion and her three eyes in the same way as in the *Sahasranāmam* there is a difference. He observes in a manner that amuses us that the first alone is hers properly and that the second was stolen by her from her husband. Then in the dhyana-sloka [of the *Sahasranāmam*] occurs this: '*Thārānāyakasēkharām smithamukhūm-Āpinavakshōruhām*'. '*Thārānāyakasēkharā*' means the same as '*Chandrasēkharī*'. Like

the three eyes, the moon adorning the head also is one of the attributes of *Ambāl* and that is why it is mentioned in the *dhyana-sloka*. It is this '*Thārānāyakaśekharam*' that becomes the '*Kutilasasi-chudalasekharam*' in the *Saundaryalaharī*. The *āchāryā*, however, states that the (crescent) moon is stolen from her husband, or, more cautiously, he says he suspects that she has stolen it from her husband. '*Āpīnavakshōruhām*': the *Āchāryā* expresses the same with the term, '*Kuchābhyāmānamram*'. This description [of the female anatomy], he adds, is proper to *Ambāl*.

Although the red colour, the three eyes, the crescent moon adorning the head and the body of a woman are mentioned in the *dhyana-sloka* and the *Āchāryā* repeats the same, he observes that two of these are stolen from her husband. In this way he does her *nindhā sthuthi* (ironic praise). The *Āchāryā* who accuses *Ambāl* of having stolen more than half of her husband's body has himself stolen half of the four that rightly belong to her.

In the *Sahasranāmam* itself *Ambāl* has the names, '*Thējōvathi*', '*Thrinayanā*'. There is also the appellation '*Chāruchandrakalādhārā*' meaning that she has the moon adorning her head ('*Chandrasēkharī*'). In the *Śyāmalāḍandakam*, in the stanza dealing with the presiding deity of *Śrīvidhya*, that is *Ambāl*, occur these two names, '*Chaturbhujē, Chandrakalavathamse*': the latter word means one who has the crescent moon adorning her head.

Actually, *Ambāl* does have the crescent moon and the three eyes. The *Śāsthras* also say so and I have seen *Ambāl* depicted with them in old paintings. However, the *Āchāryā*, who was omniscient, pretends not to know this and in his hymn to the Mother he says that he suspects that they (the crescent moon and the three eyes) must have been stolen from Father. He must have stated so thinking thus 'Leave alone my omniscience. I am singing the praises of Mother. Without taking a certain amount of liberty,

what kind of hymn do I compose if it cannot be a *nindha-sthruthi*.' Ordinary people believe that the crescent moon and the three eyes truly belong to *Śiva* (alone). The *Āchāryā*, the *sarvajna* (the omniscient), has expressed a view that is shared by common people.

Ambāl who stole *Śiva's* body tried to hide the stolen property. But where? In herself. She wanted to conceal the body in herself. Just as there is *Śakthi* in *Śiva*, there is *Śiva* in *Śakthi*. *Ambāl* swallowed one half of *Śiva's* body and that is how *Ardhanārīśvara* came into being.

Mothers cannot be excelled in affection. In their intense love for their children they exclaim as they cuddle them : 'I feel like eating you, chewing you up.' In the rush of love not only theft, even murder, is committed. What the *Āchāryā* spoke of as a case of theft - I am stretching to a case of murder.

The *Āchāryā* himself has spoken of a 'murder case' in the *Śivānandalahari* and it is on the basis of it that I am speaking now. What is that murder? Not one murder, but a number of murders. And all committed by the destroyer god *Śiva*. He killed an elephant and wore its skin and came to be called '*Gajasamhāramūrthi*'. The *Āchāryā* has described the act as '*Karīndhrabhangah*'. Another case of 'murder' is that of skinning a tiger. After this murder *Śiva* wore the skin round his waist. Again when he appeared in the guise of a hunter he killed a wild boar. During the time of *samhāra* (dissolution) he destroys all creatures. '*Asthajanthuh*', so the *Āchāryā* speaks of it generally. With the skin of the elephant he killed as his upper cloth, with the skin of the tiger he slew as his loin-cloth and with a deer in one hand *Śiva* looks to the *Āchāryā* like a lion after killing an elephant and like a tiger after catching a deer to eat it.

Like the lion that dwells in a cave, *Śiva* resides in the cave of our hearts. Both *Śiva* and the lion have a common name,

‘Panchamukha’ Since it has a broad face the lion is called ‘Panchamukha’, while *Śiva* has five faces. The *Āchāryā* has composed a stanza making a pun on the name of *Śiva* and the lion. In his *Śivānandalahari* he says that, after eating the elephant and the tiger, the *Śiva*-lion keeps their skins as their outward signs. Here he says that, in the same way, *Ambāl* has swallowed *Śiva* himself and retained outwardly the crescent moon and the eye in the forehead. The lion must have left the skins of the elephant and the deer without munching them. In the case of *Ambāl*, after all of *Śiva*’s body has gone inside her, what seems an excess, the eye in the forehead, protrudes outside. We may take it that the crescent moon which is not a part of *Śiva*’s body also thrusts itself out.

In truth there was neither theft nor murder. When we say that the great Mruthyunjaya (conqueror of death) never perishes even during the great deluge, because of the greatness of *Ambāl*’s *thātanka*, how can that Eternal Being be murdered? As for the theft, poets have shown that it was in fact *Śiva* who was guilty of it. The credit must go to her for ‘a matter and a half’; but the fame which was due to her was stolen by him. What are these ‘one matter and a half’? The burning of *Kāma*, referred to earlier, and the destruction of Kala (god of death). Since the burning of *Kāma* was accomplished by the forehead eye of *Ardhanārīśvara*, half the credit for it should go to *Ambāl*. But *Śiva* has, as ‘*Kāmadahanamūrthi*’, appropriated all the fame for the burning of *Kāma*. The destruction of Kala was brought about entirely by *Ambāl*, with her left foot (that is *Ardhanārīśvarā*’s left foot), so she deserves all the credit, all the fame, for it. *Śiva* has performed eight heroic feats, and at eight sacred places. In Thirukkurukkai he is in the aspect of the destroyer of *Kāma* (*Kāmadahanamūrthi*) and in Thirukkadavūr as *Kālasamhāramūrthi*. It is *Ambāl* who is the victim of the theft committed by her husband. *Śiva* is ‘*Thaskarānām pathi*’ (‘chief of thieves’, according to Sri Rudram)

and he is so even with regard to his wife. However, she remains the *pathivratā* supreme, having offered not only her body but also her Self to him.

The *Āchāryā* sees her with the eye of a poet and when he says that *Ambāl* has stolen her husband's body entire he creates aesthetic pleasure, literary *rasa*.

The idea behind the *Āchāryā*'s statement is that *Ambāl* has absorbed *Śiva* in herself. Out of love for him she has contained the Lord in herself. Since he is in her, when we see her as *Kāmākshī* in her full form, we do not miss anything. If there is joy in worshipping Mother and Father, is there not the same joy in seeing that that Father is present in Mother herself. Just as we are happy to think of *Śiva* as '*Māthrubhūthēswara*' (*Śiva* who became Mother) we can also be happy in thinking of *Ambāl* as 'one who became Father'.

The Brahman and the Brahma-*Śakti* are two. But they need not be in two forms. *Ambāl* herself is the combined form of *Śiva* and *Śakti*. This non-dualistic truth is the ultimate inner message of the stanza.

[After a few moments' silence, the Great Seer speaks in an undertone...] The body (of *Ambāl*) is all a radiance of red. We look at her thinking of her as *Ambāl* alone, seeing each part of her body separately in that red. We see her forehead eye and the crescent moon. The two remind us of our deity [that is of the *Kānchī Śankara Mutt*], *Chandramaulīsvara*. But if we try to find out whether he is seen... No, he is not seen. But for the two (the forehead eye and the crescent moon) nothing else is seen of *Śiva*'s body. [The *Mahāswāmī* speaks a little more loudly.] It is in such a state of experience that the *Āchāryā* asks : 'O you who appropriated half his body and are not satisfied with it have now stolen the rest of his body also.'

The amrutha, the nectar, that is *Śīva* cannot be shared. It must be consumed wholly. *Ambāl* did precisely that.

DEDICATING ONE'S ALL

There has been in between talk of offering both body and *Āthmā* to the Lord. This theme is clearly dealt with in the stanza (27) beginning with the words '*Japō jalpah*'.

*Japō jalpah śilpam sakalamapi in mudhrāvirachanā
Gathih prādhakshirya-kramaṇam-āsanādhyāhuthi-vidhih
Pranāmas Samvēśah sukhamakhilam āthmārpaṇa-dhruṣā
Saparyā-paryāya-sthava bhavathu yanmē vilasitham*

In brief the *śloka* means that all that we do we must do as an offering to *Ambāl*. *Pūjā*, *japa*, *mudhrā* (gesturing with the fingers), circumambulating the goddess and prostrating ourselves before her, making offerings in *Chandi hōma*, thus worshipping her in various ways: all these are of course necessary. But *Pūjā*, *japa* and *hōma* do not take up much of our time and the rest of the time we tend to spend in worldly work or in seeking sensual gratification. This must change. Instead of being devoted to *Ambāl* for a brief hour only we must always be engaged in worshipping her, in doing *pūjā* to her, in performing *hōma*, in muttering her names. This applies not only to *upāsakas* but to all people.

'How is this possible? How can we be engaged in such worship all the time?' it will be asked. 'Don't we have to bathe, eat, sleep? Don't we have to talk to people, speak to them a few loving words? Don't we have to visit places? Must we not also spend our time in serving people? Even great *jnānis* do these things.'

Yes. Let that be. Everything is *Ambāl's* sport. But how do *jnānis*, who know everything to be her sport, keep doing things or

do not keep doing things? Try to be like them yourself. Right now it will not be possible for you to be like them. Make an effort and little by little try to come up to their level, their state. Constant practice, constant endeavour will be needed. For the present, bathing, eating, speaking, sleeping and other activities are carried on because of her power. Keep remembering now and then that we cannot do anything on our own, by ourselves. Keep cultivating, developing, this attitude. When you remember while eating that it is because of *Ambāl's* power that you eat, you will not feel like taking in undesirable food. If you remember that it is she who has empowered you to walk you will be reluctant to go to the races or to the movies. If you remember that speech is her gift you will not be inclined to waste it in gossip, in idle talk or in discussing unsavoury topics. When you are conscious that your hands and feet owe their strength to her, you will not do any wrong. In due course you will have the realisation that she it is who makes you do everything, not only what you do with your body but what you do with your mind, that is the thinking and planning you do. And instead of feeling that it is you who are doing things and instead of wanting to do things on your own, you will eventually leave everything to her, and will be resigned to her will. In the end all the bonds of worldly existence, all the urges and feelings of *Māyā*, will be traced to the workings of the mind. Turning to the path of *jñāna* and eradicating the mind seem an impossible task. So it would be enough if in our devotion to her the mind is offered to *Ambāl*; we will then be freed from its effects. Afterwards, whether she causes us to keep talking, keep doing things, or keep travelling or whether she makes us not do any of these, we will remain serene inwardly. The *Āchāryā* has blessed us with this stanza the purpose of which is to inspire us to pray to the goddess to take us to such a state.

‘*Japō-jalpah.*’ ‘*Jalpa*’ means talk, speech, all talk including indistinct babble or prattle. In the state mentioned above even *jalpa*

will be japa. 'May all my talk be the muttering (japa) of your names.'

'It is necessary in the beginning to be initiated into manthras like *Panchadaśī* and *Shōdaśī*. Japa and similar devotions are necessary to keep us away from useless talk, talk that leads to wrong-doing or sinful things. But from japa as a deliberate practice we will come to a stage when we will have the consciousness that everything that we utter is the japa of your names.' [Everything we speak will be the muttering of the names of *Ambāl*.]

'*Sakalam silpam api mudhrā virachanā*.' It means that 'all the things I do with my hands, may they be the hand gestures I make during the *pūjā* I perform to you.' '*Mudhrā virachanā*' means executing *mudhrās* or hand gestures. 'May that be all my *silpam*.' '*Śilpam*' must be understood to mean work, all activity. (In Tamil it has come to mean only sculpture.) It may be because it denotes man creating forms, images, in the same way as *Brahmā* performs his function of creation..

'I need not go in search of a temple to circumambulate you. *Gathih prādhakshinīya kramāṇam*.' 'Wherever my legs take me, may that mean circumambulating you.' 'Do I not eat?'' '*Āsanādhi*': '*aśana*' = eating or taking food; '*Āsanādhi*' = eating and so on. With the suffix 'adhi' the term suggests not only eating or consuming with the mouth but consuming or enjoying oneself with the eyes (seeing objects, scenes), with the ears (listening to speech, music, etc), with the body's sense of touch. All this means the experience derived through the sense organs. All 'eating' denotes '*āhuthi vidhi*'-and 'may it mean offering oblations to you in the sacrificial fire.'

During mealtime, before we start to eat, we offer food as an oblation to the five vital breaths in us. The Lord says in the *Gītā* that he resides in the bodies of all creatures as the *jātarāgni*

(gastric fire or fluid) called *Vaiṣvānara* to digest the food taken in by them. If we remain conscious of this fact, would we like to eat impure or undesirable food, meat, onions and so on, or drink liquor. Similarly, if we realise that it is the Lord that enjoys what we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, smell with our nose and feel with our skin, we will be averse to involve them in evil objects or matters.

‘*Samvēśa*’ : ‘the act of my lying down.’ My lying down to sleep is doing *prāṇāmam* to you, paying you obeisance. If we think that when we lie down to sleep we are at the feet of *Ambālī* how peacefully would the day end.

‘Why should the list be lengthened? In short, I need not make any special effort, nor be engaged in any difficult sadhana or religious or spiritual practice to reach you, like constantly muttering your names, performing sacrifices, doing meditation, circumambulating you and so on. If I keep doing happily whatever--’

‘*Sukham akhilam...yanmē vilasithham.*

- ‘all the things I keep doing happily, all my doings’

‘*Thava saparyā paryāyah bhavathu--*’

‘All the things I do, may they be *pūjā* performed to you.

‘*Saparyā*’ means *pūjā*. ‘*Paryāya*’ has a number of meanings, one of them being ‘substitute’. ‘May all my work be a substitute for the *pūjā* performed to you.’ ‘*Saparyā-paryāya*’ we have here the figure of speech called ‘yamaka’, repetition of words similar in sound.

To say that you do things happily, without straining yourself, that you do things naturally, is very meaningful. The mind now, not being bound to anything, will adhere to the moral way without any strain. If you always think that everything is the doing

of *Ambāl* and dedicate yourself, dedicate your mind to her, you will adhere to the moral path with ease, naturally, without any special effort on your part. Does not happiness lie in being natural? If one thinks that whatever one does is dedicated to *Ambāl* one is likely to be happy to that extent. When we forsake all attachments and go to *Ambāl* for refuge, the righteous conduct essential to eternal happiness will come naturally to us. It is a state in which we may not even make a conscious effort to live a moral life.

The *Bhāgavatam* speaks of nine types of devotion and of them '*Āthmanivēdhanam*' is the highest. The Lord, speaking of the same in the concluding stanzas of the *Gītā*, describes it as total surrender. The *Āchāryā* teaches the same in this stanza (27).

'*Sukhamakhilam Āthmasamarpaṇa - dhruṣā*': '*Āthmasamarpaṇam*' is the same as '*Āthmanivēdhanam*', total surrender, '*saraṇāgathi*'. This is the life-breath of the *śloka*. Not only of this *śloka*, it is the life-breath of all religious systems [smiling within himself the *Mahāguru* continues...] It is indeed the life-breath of life itself. '*Āthmasamarpaṇa-dhruṣā*' means 'in the attitude of offering this life itself wholly to *Ambāl*. Only if you have such an attitude will your speech ever become the muttering of her names, your work will become hand gestures made during worship, and all such things mentioned earlier [will become her adoration]. 'May it happen so by virtue of your *Āthmasamarpaṇam*'; that is the meaning implied by the *Āchāryā* when he says 'bhavathu', the word that comes later. The *Āchāryā* has painted a picture of how a man who has offered his very life to *Ambāl* (who has totally surrendered to her) will conduct himself. His life will all be *pūjā*--- '*Saparyā-paryāyah vilasitham.*'

The *Āchāryā* has blessed us with another stanza which expresses almost the same idea. It is part of the '*Śivamānasapūjā-sthōthram*'

*Āthmā thvam Girijā mathih sahacharāh prānāh sarīram gruham
Pūjā the visha yōpa-bhōga-rachanā nidrā samādhi sthithih
Sanchārah padhayōh pradhakshiṇavidhih sthōthrāṇi sarvā girō-
Yad yathkarma karōmi taththad-akhilam Śambhō thavārāadhanam*

‘You, the *Paraśiva*, is my *Āthmā*; my mind is *Ambikā*, *Girijā*, daughter of the mountain; my five vital breaths are your attendants, the *Pramatha gaṇas*; my body is your temple; all my enjoyments are *your pūjā*; my sleep is *samādhi*; whatever I speak is your hymn; whatever I do, O *Sambhu* is indeed your worship.’

In the *Gītā* the Lord exhorts us similarly to offer everything of ours to him. ‘Whatever you do, whatever sacrifice you perform, whatever charity you make, whatever tapas you do (whatever you do with concentration, with intensity, is tapas) offer them to me.

Yath karōshi yadh asnasi, yajjuhōshi dhadhāsi yath

Yath thapasyasi Kaunthēya thath kurushva madharpaṇam

- Bhagavadhgītā, 9.27

Jnānasambandhar, *Sundharamūrthi*, *Appar*, *Maṇikkavāchakar*, the *Āzhvārs* and great men belonging to other religions speak of total surrender. It is surrender that leads to liberation which is the highest goal of this life itself.

If you follow the path of *jnāna* it is the ‘annihilation of the mind’; if you take the path of devotion the same becomes ‘*saranāgathi*’, surrender. The two paths take you to the same goal: the bliss of liberation in this very life, *jīvanmukhti*.

* * *

ŚIVA-ŚAKTHI : LIFE-BODY

Only so long as there is life in us can we mutter the names of *Ambāl*, make hand gestures (*mudhras*) as we worship her, circumambulate her and pay obeisance to her-or walk, talk, eat

and sleep. It is *Ambāl* who makes us do all these as the life of our life. And if our ordinary talk or even babble becomes the devout muttering of her names, if all our work becomes hand gestures of her worship and if every act of ours becomes a part of the *pūjā* performed to her by us, she indeed is the one who is the cause behind all these. But to think that it is our life that makes our body do all its activities is not true. There is another life behind our individual life and this individual life is governed by the greater life. We must develop the attitude that it is she who makes our individual life do all that our body does. We must also know that it is not just one life, one individual life, that figures here. *Ambāl* who has the whole world as her body and is the larger life infuses life into all of us. When we recognise this truth we also recognise that everything that happens in this world is caused by it, by that larger life. There is a saying (in Tamil), 'Without Him not even an atom can stir.' When we are convinced about the truth behind this idea our resolve to dedicate ourselves utterly and to offer ourselves to It-the greater life that is *Ambāl*-will be strengthened. *Ambāl*'s cosmic form is dealt with in two successive stanzas (34 and 35) in the hymn. The first:

Śarīram thvam Śambhōh sasi-mihira-vakshōruha-yugam
Thavāthmānam manyē Bhagavathi navāthmānamanagham
Athah sēshah seshīthyayamubhaya-sādhārataathayā
Sthithah sambandhō vām samarasa-parānandhaparayōh

The *Āchāryā* says at first, 'You are *Paramēśvarā*'s body.' '*Śambhōh Śarīram thvam*', that is *Īśvara*'s body is *Ambāl*. Similar to the statement made earlier, he observes that she has stolen his entire body and not just half of it. But here the body is not red in colour, nor is it female; it also does not have the forehead eye and the crescent moon. *Ambikā* here is *Īśvara*'s body which embraces millions and millions or trillions and trillions of *Brahmāndas*. That

is the *virāt svarūpa* [a form that embraces all the worlds and fills all space].

For the *Paramāthmā* all the universes constitute his body. And it is the Parabrahmam that is the life in it, the *Āthmā* in it -- and it is again the Parabrahmam that imparts not only life to the prapancha but also knowledge and forms the basis of all its functions.

What is said here seems different from the statement made in the very first stanza of the *Saundaryalaharī*. There it was said that without *Śakthi*, *Śiva* could not even stir a bit. It means that *Śiva* is inert or insentient and that it is *Ambāl* that is the life activating that inert body. If you say that *Śiva* without *Śakthi* is *sava* (corpse) does it not refer to a body without life. Here the *Āchāryā* says, 'Mother, you are the body of *Śambhu* (*Śiva*).'

However, these statements are from two different viewpoints. If you examine the first stanza carefully you will notice that the *Āchāryā* does not view *Śiva* without *Sakthi* as *sava*. To glorify *Ambāl* he says that she is the life-giving principle. Although it could be construed that without her *Śiva* is *sava* - I myself took the view in that context - it is not entirely true. The *Āchāryā* speaks from the Adhvaitic point of view of *Śiva* as the *Nirguṇa* Brahmam, functionless, quiescent. That state of fullness can never be one lacking in life force. But if it does not have the awareness of its fullness, it is as good as not existing - as if it were dead. 'As if', 'like' - not in truth in a dead state, not in reality. It is neither in a dead state nor in a non-dead state: it is in fact in no state at all. The *Āchāryā* says that *Ambāl* is the *jnānasakthi* who is the cause of self-awareness without the Brahmam. Then he says that the *jnānasakthi* associated *Īśvara* with the power of desire and the power of doing and made the functionless entity perform a function. He further points out that *Ambāl* remains the life of *Śiva* in the same way as the *Nirguṇa* Brahmam becomes aware of Itself.

What is mentioned here is the functioning Brahman. When the *Saguṇa Brahman*, that is *Īśvarā*, is activated by *Kāmēśvarī*, *Īśvara* himself becomes the functioning Brahman and conducts the world. Thus the world or cosmos becomes his body and the life in it, the power of action, becomes *Īśvarā*.

There is *Kāmēśvarī* who is *icchāśakthi*, the power of desire, and this power goads the Parabrahman, the primordial Reality... Adhvaitha does not go into any elaborate explanation of its concepts. 'It is the Brahman that becomes the *Īśvara* with attributes (*Saguṇa*) through *Māyā* to conduct the affairs of the world. *Māyā* has no life of its own and is inert. It obtains its life from the Brahman and veils that very Brahman, revealing to it the cosmos. And the Brahman conducts the world as *Īśvara* in company with *Māyā*, so it is said in the non-dualistic texts. That the Brahman is *Śiva* and that *Ambālī* is *Māyā* and so on I have already mentioned earlier. Since the cosmos appears because of *Māyā*, it can be said to be *Māyā*, otherwise *Ambālī*. That *Māyā* is inert. Since it shines because of the life force of the Brahman it—that is *Māyā*—can be said to be *Ambālī*. And *Śiva* who is in the place of the Brahman can be said to be its life. This is the meaning of the words, '*Śarīram thvam Śambhōh*': 'You are the body of *Īśvarā*.'

The *Saṅkhya* system has more or less the same view. According to it, Puruṣa, the Reality that is the support of life, and Prakṛthi, the cause behind the appearance of the cosmos, are like life and the body. It is explained like this: 'Of the two functions, veiling the Brahman, and making it appear as the cosmos, greater importance is given to veiling that is *Māyā*. Even in ordinary conversation we often remark that something or other has 'disappeared like *Māyā*'. Prakṛthi, instead of merely veiling, gives strength to a work being done. When we see that Prakṛthi is understood as Nature, we find that in the place of the fundamental Reality, importance is given to the cosmos in the form of a

functioning entity. That importance is given to the 24 *thathvas* such as the five elements, the five *thanmathras*, the five sense organs of the *jīvāthmā* (individual Self) shows that this world and its activities have a greater importance in the *Saṅkhyā* system. Adhvaitha reproduces in its system these 24 *thathvas* since they have gained a high place among intellectuals. But, otherwise, a knowledge of these serves no purpose in the religious and spiritual practice of the Adhvaithi - nor is it disadvantageous for him not to know them. On the whole importance is given in the *Saṅkhyā* system to Prakruthi undergoing *parinama* or change as the living cosmos. The *Āchāryā* speaks in this manner, conceiving *Ambāl* as *Īśvara's* body and then as the body of the universe, with her breasts being the sun and the moon. This, he says, is more in keeping with the *Saṅkhyā* than with the non-dualistic system.

Although the first part of this stanza can be explained according to the Adhvaitha and *Saṅkhyā* systems, matters coming later belong to the *kaula* and *Samaya* traditions of the *Śāktha* doctrine. There is support in the *Saṅkhyā* system for the opinion expressed first (that *Ambāl* is *Śiva's* body and that she is also the embodiment of the cosmos). Outward worship with *yanthras* and idols is *kaula* while *Samaya* is adoring *Ambāl* within oneself, -in one's heart space (*hrudhayākāśā*), conceptually. The latter is called *Samaya* because it regards *Śiva* and *Ambāl* as being equal on five counts.

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THE MOTHER WHO SUCKLES ALL THE ŚĒSHA-ŚĒSHĪ CONCEPT

Philosophical concepts may be within our grasp or may be beyond us. Even if we do not understand them it does not matter. Love cannot be beyond anybody's reach. That is what we need. That love is the love of the Mother of all the universe, the love of

the one who is indeed the embodiment of the universe. When the *Āchāryā* speaks of her as the body in which inheres the life of the Lord, he brings her to us as the milk of our Mother's breasts. Even though he conceives of her as one not possessing a body but as one embodying the universe, as *virāt svarūpa*, that is embracing all the worlds and filling all space, he is reluctant to speak of her as being inert or insentient. He is unable to forget her motherhood or motherliness. That is why, thinking of that *virāt svarūpa*, that cosmic figure, as a mother who suckles all the creatures of the world, he mentions her as '*sasī-mihiravakshōruhayugam*' (Stanza 34), which means that the sun and the moon are her two breasts.

Like a mother suckling her children, the World Mother suckles all living beings, and even all plants, with the rays of the sun and the moon. (Plants too have life. Early in this century -20th -Jagadish Chandra Bose established scientifically that plants have life. But we had known it from the time of the *Vedhās*.)

What does it mean when it is said that *Ambāl* feeds all living beings with the light of the sun and the moon? It is well known that the vegetable kingdom is sustained by the rays of the sun. Seeds sown in a place that is shut off from sunlight will not sprout and grow. Plants absorb the 'essence of life' directly from the sun. Moreover, we who cannot directly receive it from the sun are indirectly provided with it by the plants. Just as we light the fireplace and cook our food on it, plants act as a solar cooker for us: they preserve solar power for us in a digestible form. When we eat vegetables or cereals like rice, it is the '*prasāda*' of the sun that gives us sustenance, *prasāda* that we receive in the form of its power.

If the earth is a living planet it is because of the sun and the biosphere it creates. The power ceaselessly released from its light pervades all atoms and the photosynthesis that takes place in the

plants because of it sustains this living world. This fact discovered by modern science was known to us aeons ago as is to be seen from our ancient texts like the *Vedhās* and *Śāsthras*. Manthras like the *Gāyathī* are meant for us to receive the sun's energy directly in the same manner as plants receive them. We have gone many steps further than science and have not stopped with gaining physical strength. By chanting the *Gāyathī* we derive the power to stimulate us inwardly, to make our intelligence, intellect, brighter and more vigorous, to give us strength in our spiritual practice and to enable us to reach the Ultimate. The sun's power is affectionately termed by us as 'Savithā' and 'Sāvithrī', the mother who has given birth to us and given life to us. This power is also a part of the primordial *Śakthi*, that is *Parāśakthi*, the Mother, who is at the source of all, the one who feeds us with milk, so says the *Āchāryā*.

The *Āchāryā* mentions the moon also in this context. What sustenance do we get from its rays? Moonlight is so cool and it gives us delight which itself is a kind of nourishment. Moreover, we must remember that medicinal plants derive their therapeutic property from the moon. By eating indiscriminately the things produced in the sun we suffer from this or that ailment and we go in search of remedies. The medicinal herbs derive their nourishment from the moon.

Sōmalathā is foremost among these herbs, according to the *Vedhās* themselves. 'Sōma' means the moon. The essence of *Sōma*, *Sōmarasa*, may be called amrutha, the divine ambrosia of the world. The main feature of *Sōma* sacrifices is the offering of the essence of the *Sōma* plant. The nectar flowing from the crown of a yogi's head is to be traced to the moon.

The tides of the ocean are caused chiefly by the attraction of the moon. The seasons, seasonal winds, rains are all connected with the moon. The sun's rays produce water vapour which comes

down to earth as rain; rain enriches plant life and in turn brings us a bountiful harvest. Everybody knows that the sun feeds us in this way and keeps us alive. But the tides also have a role in producing rains and the moon has a greater part in producing the tides. So it means that the moon too nourishes us.

That *Ambāl* sustains us as *Annapūrnēśvari* by providing us milk through the sun and the moon is very appropriate. To say that *Ambikā* suckles all living beings (including plants) through the sun's flow of heat and the moon's flow of coolness is a scientific truth told in the language of devotion.

If the sun illumines our intelligence, the moon is the presiding deity of the mind. We know as a fact that just as on the full moon and New Moon days tides are caused in the ocean of salt, the ocean of the mind is also affected. We note it in the case of mentally ill people. That they are called 'lunatics' shows that their condition is connected with the moon. ('Luna' is the Latin for the moon.)

The sun and the moon have the power to bless us in this world and the next. This is shown by the fact that on the New Moon libations are offered to the fathers, that the New Moon day is called 'a day of fullness' (in Tamil Nadu) and that the chanting of manthras during eclipses has an extra degree of potency. These blessings are ultimately droplets in the milk of *jñāni* granted by *Ambāl*. It is in consideration of all this that the *Āchāryā* speaks of the sun and the moon as *Ambāl*'s breasts, '*sasī-mihira vakshōruhayugam*'.

It is customary to describe the sun and the moon as the right and left eyes of the *Paramāthmā*. There is a stanza (48) in this hymn which says, addressing *Ambāl* : 'Your right eye is the sun that creates daytime and your left eye is the moon that causes night.' I spoke earlier of the *Sahasranāmam* saying that *Ambāl*'s *thātankas* are the sun and the moon. But the idea that the sun and

the moon are the breasts of *Ambāl* who suckles us, her children, is profoundly moving.

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‘ŚĒSHA’; ‘ŚĒSHI’ = PROPERTY; OWNER OF PROPERTY

From now on, philosophical concepts are dealt with and *Ambāl* and *Īsvara* are said to be associated with ‘*Sēsha*’ and *Sēshi*’. I shall explain the idea briefly.

The body called ‘*sarīra*’ has a life in it called ‘*sarīri*’. ‘*Śarīram thvam Śambhōh*’. It means *Ambāl* and *Īsvara* have the relationship of *sarīra* and *sarīri*. Since we see that life inheres the body we should not mistake it to be the property of the body. The purse is in our coat pocket, so we think we are its owner and that the purse is our property. We must not think the relationship is similar in respect of the life and the body. As the *Āchāryā* himself remarks in his *Shatpadhī Sthōthram*, to think that the body owns life is as foolish as to think that the ocean belongs to the waves, that the waves are not the property of the ocean. Can we think so because the waves are on the surface of the ocean and beneath them are the waveless waters of the ocean? It is the same case with body and life. It is life that controls the body. If it departs the body will decompose and emit a foul smell. Then that life adopts another body. So life is the owner and body its property. Property is ‘swam’. If property is ‘swam’, the one who owns it is ‘*Swāmī*’. *Thāyumānavar* says: ‘Everything is your property.’ *Paramēśvarā* has created everything in the universe, sentient beings and insentient objects - and they are all his property.

‘*Sēshi*’ is the owner, prabhu or lord; ‘*sēsha*’ is his property, his slave. Before stating that ‘everything is your property’, *Thāyumānavar* says: ‘All are your slaves.’ The body is under the sway of the spirit or life and obeys its orders.

To speak of the sentient world and the Lord as *sarīra* and *sarīri* respectively and, on the same basis, as *śeṣha* and *Śeṣhī* is a cardinal tenet of the *Viśiṣṭādhvāitha* (qualified monism) of *Rāmānujāchāryā*.

According to Adhvāitha, when *Paramēśvarā* is the *Nirguṇa* Brahman his 'I-consciousness' is *Ambāl*. The *Āchāryā* has spoken about it first, about the subject of 'what is one's own'. This is the inner meaning of the first half of the very first stanza of the hymn. In a subsequent stanza (7), he mentions clearly that *Ambāl* is *Paramēśvarā*'s *Āhōpurishikā*. In this state *Śiva* and *Śakthi* are inseparable and there is no question of their being regarded as *Śeṣha* and *Śeṣhī*. Later, accepting the reality of the dualistic world, of the empirical world, have we not dealt with the Trinity, the deities performing the Panchakruthya and so on? In this state it is only because of a tiny fraction of *Ambāl*'s power that they are able to perform their functions (Stanza 2). The five deities carry out their functions if she does no more than flicker her eyebrows (Stanza 24). Here she is the '*mahā-yajamāni*', *Śeṣhī*, and the deities who do her bidding are *Śeṣhas*. Among them there are Rudra, *Mahēśvara* and *Sadāśiva* who are aspects of *Śiva*. That *Ambāl* is *Śeṣhī* to them, they themselves being *Śeṣhas*, is the subject of the present stanza (34)

Above all it must be noted that from a worm, from an insect, to the deities performing the Panchakruthya, the bodies of all have been created by *Ambāl* and she dwells in all of them as their life, as the one *Śakthi*. So like us who are *Śeṣhas* to that *Śeṣhī* is *Īśvara* who too is her *Śeṣha*.

According to the *Śāktha* system also *Ambāl* is *Śeṣhī* and *Śiva* is *Śeṣha*. This is expressed by the words, '*Thavāthmānam manye Bhagavathi navāthmānam anagham.*'

Īśvara is said to have nine 'angas', starting with 'kala' and ending with '*jīvāthmā*'. That is what is called '*navāthmā*'. *Ambāl*

imbues them with life and rules over them. So she is *Śārīri* or *Śēshī* and *Īśvara* with his nine angas is her *Śārīra* (body) and *Śēsha*.

All this on one side. But there is another side according to which, if there is a *Śakthi*, there must be one who possesses it. The one who possesses *Parāśakthi* is *Śiva*. Here, when we speak of the other side, he is *Śēshī* and she is *Śēsha*. As *Īśvara* he is the functioning Brahman, the *Saguṇa* Brahman. It must be accepted that in this aspect he is life and *Ambāl* is body, *Ambāl* here meaning all those who come under the province of his function, the sentient beings and the insentient objects. He is then *Śēshī* and *Ambāl* is *Śēsha*.

The word 'śēsha' is usually understood as remainder. What is left over is 'śēsham'. 'Left over' implies the existence of a larger original entity of which it remains a part. What is *Śēshī* then? That of which something is a remainder is *Śēshī*. If the *Paramāthmā* is the original source, the fundamental entity, all this world is constituted of droplets from it. So the world and *Īśvara* stand in the relationship of *Śēsha-Śēshī*. 'From the Brahman that is full in the true sense has emerged this cosmos which appears to be full. Even after the outward emergence of the cosmos from it the Brahman remains as full as ever.' These Upanishadic words refer indeed to *Śēsha-Śēshī*. '*Śārīram thvam Śambhōh*': *Ambāl* is *Śēsha*, the Lord is *Śēshī*. This is an expression of the view that there exists inwardly life that is the Brahman, the serene-*Śiva*, the body outside of it being *Śakthi* in the form of the cosmos.

Śaiva extremists say that *Śiva* is life and that *Ambāl* is body, whereas *Śāktha* extremists say, reversing this, that *Ambāl* is life and that *Śiva* is body. *Śaivas* and *Śāktas* who have had inward realisation (anubhavis) say in the texts composed by them that equal importance must be given to the two, *Śiva* and *Ambāl*. It is an aspect of this doctrine of the equality of the two which means that, if *Śiva* is *Śēshī* and *Ambāl* *Śēsha*, *Ambāl* can also be *Śēshī* and *Śiva*

Śeṣha, and that if *Śiva* is *Śarīri* and *Ambāl Śārīra*, *Ambāl* can also be *Śarīri* and *Śiva Śārīra*.

Without making any distinction between the *Śaiva* and *Śāktha* systems on the one hand and between *Visishtādhvaitha* (qualified monism), *Saṅkhyā* and *Adhvaitha* on the other, the *Āchāryā* says here that the Jagath or cosmos which *Adhvaithis* reject as *Māyā* is the body and property of the *Paramāthmā*. But viewing the world from the empirical point of view and taking into account the state of the common people, he says that the cosmos is the body and that the *Paramāthmā* is its *Antaryāmi* or Inner Controller, thus seeming to speak from the point of view of qualified non-dualism (monism).

The *Āchāryā* says that the *Śeṣha-Śeṣhī* relationship is '*ubhayasādhārāṇa*'. It means it is based on the equality of *Ambāl* and *Śiva*. That the two are equal is shown in five different ways. The *Samaya* concept of the *Śāktha* system is based on this. Both *Śiva* and *Ambāl* have the same abode, they have similar rūpa or appearance, they have the same function and the same status. Even their names are similar, *Śiva* and *Śiva*, *Bhairava* and *Bhairavi*. So it is equality in five aspects. Along with these the *Āchāryā* shows that the two are equal with regard to the *Śeṣha-Śeṣhī* relationship also.

When we think of *Śiva*, the *Nirguṇa Brahman*, as a living entity it means that the body of this life is *Ambāl*, the *Saguṇa Brahman*. And she is not just the inert body, she pulsates in all parts, in every blood vessel and nerve, from the hair on the head to the nails in the fingers and the toes. In our case [that is of human beings] life departs from our body one day. Such is not the case with the entity mentioned above. The body called *Ambāl* in whom *chaitanya*, life force, prevades throughout, will never depart from it and the living *Śivam* too will not be separated from it. For *Paramēśvarā Ambāl* is not only a body but a shield that can never be separated from it, a shield like the one worn by *Karṇa*.

The cosmos seen outside is like the body seen outside and it will be seen so long as the mind exists. When you sleep, when you are unconscious or when you are in *samādhi*, the mind does not work; the sense organs become inactive. Then what is the body and who is the *Śārīrī*? Who is the *Śēsha* and who is the *Śēshī*? Since nothing is known in sleep and in the unconscious state there is nothing dualistic. A *jñāni* who has reached the state of *samādhi* and come to the stage of possessing no mind has no cosmos and therefore neither the power nor the entity that conducts it. Also no such thing as the 'owner *Paramāthmā*' controlling the 'property' called the *jīvāthmā* (the individual Self). To know the association of two such entities there must be a mind. But the mind has been obliterated. Does the *jñāni* remain in the state of sleep or unconsciousness? No, it would be wrong to say so. His is not a state of nothingness: it is the state of Oneness [without a second] - this is how the *Āchāryā* establishes non-dualism.

However, he has a lesson for those who are not yet *jñānis*. His teaching is such as to accustom them to look upon everything including the mind, the five elements and so on as pervaded by *Ambāl*, as imbued with her. It is as a preliminary to this state that he wants them to think of the Brahman as life (a living entity) and *Ambāl* as the body of the cosmos: in other words he means that the Jagath or the universe is *Ambāl*.

The *Āchāryā* observes that the cause of dualism, which is the mind, is also *Ambāl*. This is how he begins his next stanza (35).

'Manas-thvam'. 'Thvam' = you; 'manas' = mind. 'You exist as the mind.'

'Mother, this mind, which is the cause of so much that is false and of so much trouble, is also you.'

'Mother, who are you? Where does such a question spring from? Is it not from my mind? That also is you.'

When one follows the path of *jnāna* the mind is erased. But here the question is how to get used to the idea that the mind itself is *Ambāl*. If *Ambāl* is always in your thoughts, the mind will not give room to falsities nor will it invite trouble. *Ambāl* herself will then take you to the state where there is no mind. Such a state is called '*jnānākāśa*'.

'We do not see it now?'

'It does not matter. You do see the sky, the vast expanse of the blue sky, don't you? Learn to look upon it also as *Ambāl*. The mind also will unfold itself and become an open expanse like the sky.'

'*Vyōma* thvam'. 'Thvam' = you; '*vyōma*' = sky (space).

'Are you only space? The five elements are also you. Next to space is wind, air - that is also you, Mother.'

It is because *Ānjanēya* was born to Maruth that he is called '*Māruthi*'. 'Maruth asi.'

'What about Agni (Fire) that is next to *Vāyu*? It is another aspect of yours. The *Vēdhās* themselves proclaim that 'you are the colour of fire, that you glow with ascetic endeavour (thapas).'

'Maruth *sārathi* asi.'

The wind god is the charioteer of fire. Does not fire spread in the direction the wind blows? Since Maruth is the charioteer of Agni, we have the term '*Maruth -sārathi*' for Agni, one who has Maruth for *sārathi*.

'*Thvam āpah, thvam bhūmih*.'

'You are water. You are also the earth where we live.'

In the five chakras of the body from the *mūlādhāra* to visuddhi [in the ascending order] *Ambāl* resides in the form of the five elements prthivi to *ākāśa*. In the chakra next to it she resides as

manas (mind). This is mentioned in an earlier stanza (9), beginning with the words, '*Mahim mūlādhārē...*'

'Why go on unnecessarily. There is no object in which you are not present. '*Thvayi pariñathayām na hi param.*'

'*Pariñathayām*': *Ambāl* herself has evolved into all objects, all beings.

I have so far dealt with the first two lines of the stanza (35).

Manasthvam vyōma thvam marudasi Maruthsārathirasi

Thvamāpasthvam bhūmih Thvayi Pariñathāyām na hi param

In the next two lines the *Āchāryā* says: 'As the wife of *Paramēśvarā*, you have yourself taken the form of the bliss of *jñāna* for the purpose of evolving into the body of the cosmos.

Thvamēva svāthmānam pariñamayithum visva-vapushā

Chidhānandhākāram Śivāyuvathibhāvēna vibhrushē'

Total realization is sath-chith-ānanda. *Śiva* does not remain as sath or the Reality alone; he is chith that is consciousness or having awareness and ananda (that is experiencing bliss). We have been saying from the very beginning that *Ambāl*'s function is this, experiencing this *Śiva*. The term '*chidānandalaharī*' occurs in an earlier stanza (8). The *Āchāryā* mentions the cause of chith shining and unfolding itself and of ānanda arising and then becoming *Śivapathni* (wife of *Śiva*):

'Thvamēva svāthmānam pariñamayithum visva-vapushā'

'You must evolve yourself into the cosmic form. It is for this reason that, as *Śiva*'s wife, you have taken the form of *chidānanda*.'

'The Brahman becoming aware of itself and experiencing bliss and remaining by itself is not the end of everything. It acquires chith and ānanda to evolve into the cosmos that is

different from itself.' What is stated here thus is entirely a *Śāktha* concept and has nothing to do with Adhvaitha. About creation non-dualism says: 'It somehow happens because of *Māyā*. How, why, for what purpose, there is no answer to such questions. One has to accept that it is all the work of *Māyā*. There is no point in making further inquiries.' The *Śāktha* and other devotional systems explain the creation of the cosmos thus. 'The one chith, or Great Awareness, divided itself into many smaller units of awareness and the one *Ānanda*-the Great Bliss-divided itself into numerous smaller units of bliss. And the purpose of the creation of the cosmos is to watch the sport of the drama conducted with all these. If we think that the drama is real we will be immersed in *Māyā* and become lost. If we watch the drama with the understanding that in this cosmos of *Māyā* too there is chidhānanda rasa and that the purpose of creation is to derive joy from the drama enacted in sport by *Sivayuvathī*, the wife of the Sath or the Reality, that is if we too regard the whole thing as sport, drama, as the evolution taking place in *Parāśakti*'s marvellous imagination, we will become steeped in chidhananda and attain oneness with the Reality.'

The *Āchāryā* mentions *pariṇāma* in two places in the stanza. '*Thvayi Pariṇāthāyām na hi param*' (there is none other than you to have evolved into the cosmos); '*thvameva svāthmānam pariṇamayithum visva-vapushā*' (for the purpose of evolving yourself into the cosmos). There is no *pariṇāma* in Adhvaitha. One thing becoming another, like milk turning into curd, is *pariṇāma*. Adhvaitha does not say that the Brahman changes in this manner. According to it the unchanging Brahman gives the false impression of the cosmos because of *Māyā*. But *Sāṅkhya* believes that the cosmos is the *pariṇāma* of Prakruthi-not the *pariṇāma* of Purusha. It is this idea that the *Āchāryā* mentions here. He expresses how the *Śāktha* system has given shape to a *Sāṅkhya* tenet to suit its own view.

If we conduct research into how far the *Āchāryā* has departed from Adhvaitha in the views expressed in his devotional hymns in consideration of the spiritual advancement of people with different mental attitudes, we will make many interesting discoveries. 'Would the *Āchāryā* have done so?' you might ask. One feels like answering the question by saying that 'only the *Āchāryā*, who is compassion personified, could have done so.'

You will remember that I spoke about 'kaulam' in the *Śāktha* system. According to one branch of it there are a number of explanations for the term '*Śivayuvathī*'. '*Śivayuvathī*' does not mean merely *Śiva*'s wife, 'Mrs. *Śiva*'. She inheres in herself *Śivahood* [all that is meant by *Śiva*] and she is indeed *Śivam* in the aspect of a yuvathi (young woman). In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs the term '*Svādhīnavallabhā*' which means 'one who keeps her husband under her sway.' If we extend this meaning we form the idea that the husband (*Śiva*) is 'contained' in the wife *Ambāl*. '*Na hi param*': there is none other than she. This remark of the *Āchāryā* about *Ambāl* will be fixed in our minds if we consider the explanation of the name '*Śivayuvathī*' given above.

Thoughts occur in the mind. But the mind is *Ambāl*. The *Āchāryā* begins his stanza with 'manasthvam'. The mind is the source of all undesirable and harmful thoughts, but if we accustom ourselves to the idea that it is *Ambāl* herself, each one of us will be a king, a king of the empire of the *Āthmā*, *Āthmasāmrājya*, and fit to perform our own coronation ceremony. We need not turn our mind inward nor suppress it altogether. Even if it is turned outward, turned to the world, we must think that everything is *Ambāl*, all this world of five elements; '*Maruth sārathirasi*' ('you are fire'), 'everything is you'; 'without your evolving yourself there is nothing (*Thvayi Parināthāyām na hi param*).' If you thus see that everything is pervaded by *Ambāl*, and if you realise that the mind experiencing all this is also *Ambāl*, you will eventually

come to have the same experience as she has of *chidhānanda* in this drama of creation. Our knowledge, which is very little will unite with the knowledge that is great, that is her chith, and our petty pleasures will dissolve in the great Bliss that she is and we will ourselves become the embodiment of *chidānanda*. Since this denotes the place of the wife of *Śiva*, each one of us will become *Śivayuvathī* and attain oneness with him that is the Brahman. What more do we have to gain?

You will remember what I told you earlier about the Baroda University having a palm-leaf manuscript of the *Saundaryalaharī*. In it each stanza of the hymn carries an illustration. A copy of this manuscript is with the Philadelphia Art Museum. The Sanskrit professor of that university (a white) sent photographs of three leaves of the manuscript to his counterpart in Madras University asking for certain clarifications. One of the three palm-leaves carried this stanza, beginning with the words 'Manasthvam'. One would think that a verse expressing abstract ideas cannot be illustrated. But, remarkably enough, there was a picture also accompanying this *śloka*.

* * *

GIST OF THE TWO STANZAS

I will now give you the gist of the two stanzas (34 and 35), mentioning points I may have omitted to deal with and ideas I may perhaps have already touched upon.

It is *Ambālī* that is *Īśvara*'s body. And it is not the gross body alone that is meant but also the extremely subtle mind that is in it. The first stanza starts with the gross, '*Śarīram thvam*', and the second with the subtle, '*manasthvam*'. We may take it that it is our mind that is referred to-or we may take it that it is the mega-mind or mahat that is referred to, mahat which is the cause of the five

elements. From the mind that is the root arises *ākāśa* or space that is subtle. It becomes increasingly gross, giving rise to air, fire, water and earth. 'All these are you (*Ambāl*),' says the *Āchāryā*. 'There is no object other than you,' he adds. '*Thvayi Parinīthāyām na hi param.*' 'Although you are the body of the life or spirit called *Śambhu*, you have existed without any distinction made between body and spirit. It is you who evolved into the body called *viśva* or the cosmos': '*Thvam eva svāthmānam parinīthamāyitum viśvavapushā.*'

Here you find a distinction made between body and spirit as in the Ramanuja's system. However, though there is a suggestion of dualism, everything becomes non-dualistic since in the end '*chidānandākāram*' is referred to. Even if *chith* and *ānanda* are apparently separated from *sacchidānanda* (leaving *sath* alone), the three together form one. A sweet dish has a form, a smell and a taste. Can we separate one of them from the other two? (For example, can we separate the smell from the taste?) *Ambāl* who is referred to as rooted in *jnāna* and *ānanda* is also the non-dual *Sath* or Reality. Now can the supreme *jnāna* that is at the root, and the supreme bliss that is also at the root, exist without the basis of *Sath*? We may say that it is to experience *jnāna* and *ānanda* outwardly or for the creatures of the world (*Ambāl*'s children) to derive the same experience that she who is one with *Śiva* exists in the attitude of *Śivayuvathī* together with her husband *Śiva*. '*Śivayuvathī bhāvena*' - which means it is only as a way of thinking that *Ambāl* is '*Śivayuvathī*'. In reality she and *Śiva* are one. The cosmic body and *Ambāl*, who is its spirit, are one. This *Ambāl*, and *Śiva* who has made her like his body and who is the personification of *Sath*, are one. It is all non-dual.

* * *

SIVA AND ŚAKTHI IN THE CHAKRAS

After the 'manasthvam' ('the mind is you') stanza, the *Āchāryā* describes how the wife and the husband-*Ambāl* and *Śiva*-are in the Kundalini chakras in which *Ambāl* resides as the *thathvas*, from *manas* to *prthivi* (mind to earth).

In each *chakra* they have each a different name, function and quality. But there is one thing in common, their supreme compassion. In one' ('*thapana-sasi-kōti-dyuthi*'), with the radiance of millions of suns and moons, they raise the devotee to the state of liberation which is beyond the sun and the moon and fire, beyond everything. In another, remaining as bright as pure crystal, *Ambāl* rains coolness like moonlight and it is the moonlight that dispels the inner darkness of nescience. Like the *chakōra* birds imbibing the rays of the moon, devotees consume these rays. In the third *chakra*- *Śiva* and *Ambāl* dwell as a pair of hamsas. Accomplished *Adhvāithis*, *sannyasis*, *jñānis* are called 'hamsas', or 'paramahamsas'. The same meaning may be applied here. There is the *anāhatha chakra* in which *Prāṇava* is self-born. *Prāṇava* (Om) is the source of all sound. The *Āchāryā* observes that the conversation of the hamsa couple constitutes the *vidhyasthanas* (centres of learning) of the *ashtādhasa vidhya*, the eighteen branches of learning- the four *Vēdhās*, the six *Vedhāngas*, the four *Upāngas* and, added to these fourteen, are the four *Upavēdhās*. In the eighteen we have all the religious *Śāsthras*. The hamsas need a lake in which to swim. Ordinary hamsas swim in the *Manasā* lake in the Himalaya, but these divine hamsas swim in the minds (*manas*) of the great. '*Manasā*' means that which is appropriate to the mind. Like the hamsas imbibing the nectar in lotuses the divine hamsa pair imbibe the nectar of supreme beatitude from the lotus of *jñāna*. Hamsas are said to have this remarkable capacity: if milk diluted with water is kept before them they separate the milk from the mixture and 'drink' it. Thus the divine hamsa pair remove the

water representing all the wrongs we have committed and take in the good we have done, regarding it as milk, and bless us. 'O they have given us milk,' so the divine hamsa pair will think and, forgetting the wrongs we have committed, give us their blessings. If we have only dirty water to give them (that is if we have done only wrongs) what can they do even though they are compassionate?

Although the husband and the wife perform the same function, in one chakra the two appear to be different. *Ambāl* demonstrates here that she excels *Śiva* in her compassion 'Whatever it be I am Mother. *Swāmī* will not be compassionate to the same degree as I am.' Of the five elements, it is Agni that is associated with this chakra (the chakra referred to above). In this *Śiva* opens his forehead eye of fire and performs his function of destruction. Then Mother with her '*dayārdhradhrushti*' (with her look made moist and cool with compassion) performs 'saithyōpachara' for the world (renders the service of making the world cool). We ask here, 'Will Father be equal to Mother?' It is in this context that the *Āchāryā* indulges in a bit of fun by giving *Ambāl* the name of 'Samaya'. In this fun lies a great truth. The *Āchāryā* demonstrates through the name Samaya that however different *Śiva* and *Ambāl* may seem to be outwardly, they are equal and one inwardly. Then in another chakra, we see that *Śiva* himself remains a cloud raining cool. He is the cloud that brings rain to douse the flames of the fire of the deluge so that creation could be started afresh. At this time *Ambāl* is a dazzling streak of lightning in the cloud.

After dealing with *Śiva-Śakthi* in five of the chakras the *Āchāryā* completes the '*Ānandalahari*' section of the hymn with a stanza on the *mūlādhāra* chakra which stands for prthivi or earth. Ordinarily, when one deals with the chakras one starts with the *mūlādhāra*, but here the *Āchāryā* mentions it last. In a sense, the

beginning and the end are the same, so it is all non-dualistic. I will now deal with the next stanza (41).

* * *

FATHER AND MOTHER

*Thavādhārē mūlē saha Samayayā lāsyaparayā
Navāthmānam manyē navarasa-mahāthāṇḍava-natam
Ubhābhyām ēthābhyām udhaya-vidhim uddhiṣya dhayayā
Sanāthābhyām jajnē janakajanānīmaḥ jagadhidam*

In this stanza (41) *Ambāl* is adored with *Īśvara* in the lowermost chakra, that is the *mūlādhāra*. The stanza (34) beginning with the words, '*Śarīram thvam Śambhōh*', is the first of the *ślōkas* in which the divine couple are mentioned together and in it occurs the term '*navāthmā*', which is used again in the concluding stanza (of the '*Ānandalahari*' section). Here it refers to an aspect of *Īśvara* in the muladhara chakra, that is *Ānandabhairava*. Since the subject of chakras is completed with this, '*navāthmā*' must be understood as 'one with the nine *vyūhas*' like *kala*; it also means that *Śiva* is the *Āthmā* for the six chakras and the three granthis in them (six plus three, nine in all).

Ambāl dwells in this chakra as *Ānandabhairavi*, the feminine form of *Ānandabhairava*. Since she is equal to *Śiva*, the *Āchāryā* uses the name *Samayā*.

'*Thavādhārē mūlē*': in prose order '*thava mūladhaārē*', in your muladhara', thus the *Āchāryā* speaks, addressing *Ambāl*. '*Samayayā saha*' means 'with *Ānandabhairavi*, *Samayāmbāl*'. Her characteristic is mentioned: '*lāsyaparā*'. If a man is engaged in one-pointed meditation we refer to him as '*dhyānapara*'. Similarly, '*lāsyapara*' means '*engaged intensely in lāsyā*'.

'*Lāsyā*' is female dance. It is '*lālithā*', elegant and graceful. The male dance, which is vigorous, is called '*thāṇḍava*'. *Natarājā*'s

dance is *Thāṇḍava* and *Śivakāmasundari*'s is *lāśya*. In *thāṇḍava*, the *thāla* vinyāsa called *nruththa* and *jathibhēda* and *gathibhēda* are important. In *lāśya*, *bhāva* and *abhinaya* - the enactment of emotions -are important. It is on this basis that dance is divided into masculine and feminine. All this refers to the art of those past times. Now everything is becoming masculine.

Paramēśvarā is called 'Mahanata' (Mega-dancer, the Great Dancer). Even in the *Amarakōṣam* we find this name, '*Mahākālo Mahānatah*'. If he does not dance there will be no action, no movement, in the world. If it is to perish too he has to perform the 'samhāra thāṇḍava', the dance of destruction. It is *Ambāl* who stirs him to action, so it has been said in the very first stanza of the hymn. Thus, if he dances so frenetically, it is all her doing. After making him dance uproariously she too joins him and dances gracefully, tenderly. The movements we make with our legs and hands, the vibrations of our blood vessels and nerves, caused by anger, sorrow and desire, all the feelings and emotions that are within us - all these are to be attributed to the dance of this husband-and-wife 'team'.

Why should our eyes throb when we are sorrowful? Why should our lips quiver when we are angry? Is it not *Paramēśvarā* who resides in all of us as *Antaryāmi* (Inner Controller)? It is because his dance is connected with the nine rasas that our own movements reflecting them are produced. All this belongs to *lāśya* in which the portrayal of feelings and emotions predominates. There are dances, movements, in Nature that betray no feelings. The worlds keep dancing, keep revolving on their own individual axes, around themselves.

The planets keep dancing, revolving, round the sun. The wind blows : it is also a kind of dance. Water rushes down in a flood : and it is also dance. All these dances are *thāṇḍava* and have no *bhāva* and are not based on feelings. Even so they produce a

variety of *bhāvas*, feelings, in us; they also create in us *rasanubhava*, aesthetic experience. When the wind blows gently we feel happy. But when the same wind becomes a gale, a storm or a cyclone, it creates terror. If it affects us, we are hurt, we cry in grief. The moon bathes the world in its light but poets lament that it is the cause of lovers becoming separated. *Thāṇḍava* and *Lāśya* are connected with each other like *Śiva* and *Śakthi*.

This is the theme of the stanza. *Ānandabhairava* and *Samayā* dance together depicting the nine *rasas* - he performs the great *thāṇḍava* and she the *lāśya*.

In the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam* occurs the name '*Mahēśvaramahākālpa-mahathāṇḍava-sākshinī*.' The reference in this name is to the *sambhāra thāṇḍava*, the dance of destruction, while in this stanza it is to the dance of creation, *sruṣṭi Thāṇḍava*. When *Śiva* dances his *sambhāra-thāṇḍava*, *Ambālī* merely watches it as a witness (*sākshinī*-is she not Mother? In the dance of creation she joins her husband and performs the *lāśya* dance as her part.

'*Sākshinī*': the *Sahasranāmam* mentions that *Ambālī* is a mere witness to *Śiva's* dance of destruction. But I told you what the *Āchāryā* says in this connection that even during the time of dissolution, when *Śiva* rises as a great fire and burns everything, *Ambālī* rains her blessings and makes everything cool. It does not mean that she prevents the act of destruction. In the sport of the world it (dissolution) is also a part and it has to be performed. It is for this purpose that *Ambālī* has appointed *Rudra* as the authority for it. So the cooling she does is like administering anaesthesia before an operation. A military action is carried out after careful planning. *Sambhāra*, dissolution, is the operation performed by *Rudra*.

Then it is creation again. *Śiva* becomes *Ānandabhairava* and with the 'co-operation' of *Ambālī* as *Ānandabhairavī* performs the dance of creation.

The *Āchāryā* says: 'I meditate on *Ānandabhairava* and *Ānandabhairavī* danching together in the *mūlādhāra*.' *Ānandabhairavi* is also the name of a (Carnatic) *rāga*. Here we see its connection with dance also.

When we are joyous we sing and dance. Europeans, men and women, drink and dance; they perform the ball dance. We who do not know how to be happy, don't we remain glum, blowing our noses? *Īśvara* and *Ambāl* dance in an ecstasy of joy. Looking at them we must not feel too free about ourselves. That is why with *ānanda* or joy is mixed 'bhairava'. 'Bhairava' means fearfulness, anger, severity. It is meant to bring us under discipline.

The bhairava mood is temporary, a passing phase. *Ānanda* is *Śiva*'s permanent characteristic. Great *ānanda*, great joyousness, is nothing but being kind-hearted, being loving towards all. It is love for all objects of creation. 'Dayayā': the word occurs in the third line of the stanza and it means 'with compassion'.

What do the divine couple do out of their compassion? They create the world. 'What kind of compassion is it? Are not all misfortunes, all suffering, caused by the fact of creation? So creation is not an act of kindness but of cruelty,' so it would seem to us. But it is not so. Even if the divine couple stop their function of creation now, what about the fact that creation has already been there, that it somehow came into being long, long ago. After one spell of creation there is a rest for all creatures during the deluge. Then comes another spell of creation. You would like to say: 'Do not do so again, Lord.' I would point out that to think so would be wrong. Seven days make a week, thirty days make a month. Similarly, there is a stipulated length of time, millions and millions of years, for one period of creation. On its conclusion there should necessarily be the deluge. Do all creatures exhaust their karma at the time and do they all deserve liberation? No, they do not. When

the deluge occurs everybody has still some karma (effects of karma) to be lived out.

Though, superficially looked at, dissolution seems an act of cruelty, it is in fact an act of kindness. Without any consideration given to the cartloads of karma people have earned for themselves they are freed from birth and given a rest in the name of *samhāra* or destruction. This rest is not eternal liberation however prolonged it may be. Eternal release is the result of earning merit and spiritual practice and living out one's karma and in it *Īśvara* too shows his extra compassion. It means his faith in people, born of his kindness, that they have the capacity to earn merit and become freed from karma. Is it not a matter of pride for the human race? Without realising this and without trying to earn merit, we keep increasing the burden of our karma and keep being born again and again. It is then that, without our deserving moksha through our own effort, that the Lord in his kindness gives us a rest through the deluge as a substitute for mōksha. But karma still sticks to us and is not exhausted. Without living it out how do we obtain the bliss of the Brahman that is eternal liberation? Thus another spell of creation is necessitated and it gives us an opportunity to work out our karma and earn the supreme bliss of liberation. Is it not great compassion on the part of the Lord to give us another such 'chance'?

It is in pursuance of this idea that *Ānandabhairava* and *Ānandabhairavī* perform the function of creation through their dance. In this way people are given an opportunity (by being born again) to exhaust their karma and obtain liberation. That is why the *Āchāryā* uses the word 'dhayayā' in this context, meaning 'out of compassion'. Since *Ānandabhairava* and *Ānandabhairavī* (*Śiva* and *Ambā*) are the couple that create the world, the *Āchāryā* calls them Father and Mother and binds us thus to them with the ties of love and affection.

Ubhābhyām ethābhyām udhayavidhim uddhiṣya dhayayā
Sanāthābhyam jainē janakajanāmath jagadhidaṁ

‘*Ētābhyam ubhābhyām*’ = by you two who perform the *thāṇḍava* and *Lāśya* dance; ‘*udhayavidhim uddhiṣya*’ = with the intention of thinking how the world is to be created again. (‘Since you have already carried out the intention,’ this meaning is suggested. If the Supreme Goddess and *Paramēśvarā* intend to do something, it is certainly accomplished at once. There is no need to say the obvious, that it becomes a fact.) ‘*Idam Jagath*’ = this world (that is all its creatures); ‘*janaka-janani-math*’ ‘of having father and mother’; ‘*jainē*’ = so it happens.

‘Alas, we are ensnared in creation (by being born in this world). *Māyā* will shadow us and pull us down.’ To us who lament thus the *Āchāryā* speaks, comforting us, ‘Don’t be afraid, child. Don’t give way to grief.’ Then he reasons with us: ‘Why do you think of creation alone. True it is a cause for fear. But remember who created the world. *Īśvara* and *Ambāl*. As Father and Mother they have created us. Do our parents ever do us harm? It is for our own good that they have done this (created the world and us). If you keep thinking about them – Father and Mother – no evil will ever touch you and you will always be involved in what is good. If you think that you are an orphan, that you are helpless, then alone will you come under the attack of *Māyā*. Think that you have always *Parāśakthi* with you for your help and protection, *Parāśakthi* herself with *Paramēśvarā* as Mother and Father. *Māyā* then will run away from you. You are not ‘*anātha*’, an orphan. You are with those divine parents and so *sanātha*.’

As children we need to have both our parents living; only then do we seem to be ‘*sanātha*’. A child has lost its mother but its father lavishes all his care on it. Even so people will speak of it thus: ‘Poor child, it has no mother. How sad.’ There will be much sympathy for the child. On the other hand, if the child happens to

have lost its father but is still well looked after by its mother, the same people will say, ‘‘The child is an orphan. It has no father. How-sad.’’ ‘Would it not be enough if we had the Parabrahmam to sustain the world, the Parabrahmam in some form like *Parāśakthi* or *Paramēśvarā*? Why do we speak of *Umā* together with *Mahēśvara*, similarly, *Lakshmī* with *Nārāyaṇa*, *Rādha* with *Krishṇa* and *Sītā* with *Rama*? Why do we mention both names? The answer is that, since we are all children, we need both our parents *janaka* and *janani*, father and mother. If either is not there we will feel that we are orphans. We need the protection of both to be called ‘*sanātha*’.

The word ‘*sanāthābhyām*’ occurs in the stanza. Ironically enough it does not refer to us who seem to be ‘*anāthas*’ but to *Swāmī* and *Ambālī* themselves, the Lord and *Ambālī* who are our *nātha* and *nāthā*. The *Āchāryā* says, ‘*Ubhābhyām ethābhyām sanāthābhyām.*’ ‘By you two who are *sanāthas*,’ is the meaning. Does it not mean then that there is a Lord above *Īśvara* and *Ambālī* to protect them? Is not such an idea strange? A great man has observed : ‘We are not orphans. We have *Īśvara* as our guardian. It is he, *Īśvarā*, who is an orphan. There is no Lord over him to protect him. So he is an orphan.’ The *Āchāryā* speaks reversing the same.

No. It is not that there is someone above them (*Īśvara* and *Ambālī*) to make them *sanāthas*. The fact is they are each other’s guardians; they protect each other. There is no *Śiva* without *Śakthi*; there is no *Śakthi* without *Śiva*. In one aspect she is *Śeṣha* and he *Śeṣhī*; in another aspect he is *Śeṣha* and she *Śeṣhī*. Has not the *Āchāryā* himself said so before? It is all part of their sport. She takes the attitude of being superior to him and saves him when he swallows the *Kālakūta* poison and from the fire of the deluge. And he protects her as the *yajamāna* (head of the family) when she is in her aspects of *Dākṣhāyānī* and *Pārvathī* and remains submissive to

him. The manthra *Śāsthra*, the *Śivāgamās*, the *Thirumanthiram* and so on also speak in a conceptual manner of the two guarding each other. *Śiva* as superior to *Śakthi*, or *Śakthi* as superior to *Śiva*, protect each other. They are braided together in many relationships. The blessings of the two we must receive as the blessings of the one *Paramāthmā*. That is why the two have to be worshipped as Father and Mother. Even then only when he blesses us will she bless us; and only when she bless us will he bless as us, so it is said.

Paramēśvarā is called *Thāyumānavar* (in Tamil) : it means that 'he also became Mother', the implication being that *Śiva* is both Father and Mother. But does it mean that in the temple to him in Rock Fort, Thiruchi, there is no sanctum for *Ambāl*? There too *Ambāl* is present as *Sugandhakunthalāmbikā* in a sanctum shaped like the *Śrīchakra*. I have already spoken about the '*Ānandalahari*' verses inscribed in the temple.

The '*Ānandalahari*' section of the hymn concludes with the obeisance paid to Father and Mother who give us birth and rebirth and lead us to liberation.

'This world is not to go to rot out of its ignorance. It has its Father and Mother, *Parāśakthi* and *Paramēśvarā*, to guard it,' so saying the *Āchāryā* gives us courage, instils in us enthusiasm. '*Janaka-janani-math*' means 'having the character or quality of possessing Mother and Father'. For children, this is the ultimate in kinship. The *Āchāryā* dispels all our fears through his words that all people, all of us in this world, have our Father and Mother (we are not orphans).

In between, the *Āchāryā* deals with subjects like *Śrīyanthra*, *manthrabija*, *Kurṇḍalini* and so on. However, as he completes this section of the hymn, he shows us Father and Mother residing in the *mūlādhāra chakra* as the *mūlādhāra* (fundamental support) of

everything. They are so easily accessible as to enable us to become devoted to them. Thus the *Āchāryā* gives us his blessings by leaving us as children without any care in their protection. '*Ānandalahari*' thus becomes complete in the unalloyed joy of a child having discovered its parents.

* * *

ŚIVA AND ŚAKTHI IN DIFFERENT STATES

That we must always remember *Ambāl* and *Swāmī* as Father and Mother, holding them tightly in the innermost recesses of our hearts, is the general bhava or sentiment expressed (so far in the hymn): Within the framework of this idea or attitude the *Āchāryā* has portrayed *Ambāl* and *Śiva* in various states and in various relationships. If these are added as *upa-bhāvas* or subsidiary sentiments or moods there will be greater rasa, greater aesthetic delight, to be gained. In a dramatic performance there is what is called the '*sthāyī bhāva*' that is basic and runs through the whole play. Then there are '*sanchāri bhāvas*' that arise now and then enhancing the beauty of the main sentiment or theme. In the same way, let us see briefly how *Śiva* and *Ambāl* are depicted in different ways in the '*Ānandalahari*' section of the hymn.

The crest jewel of *Ambāl*'s glory is the fact that she activates Father (*Śiva*) who cannot otherwise even stir. This is the message of the first stanza. In the eyes of the world, *Śiva*'s role is chiefly that of the destroyer but in speaking of this too *Ambāl*'s greatness is shown in the next stanza to be such as to arouse our sense of wonder : it is a speck of the dust from her foot that enables *Śiva* to perform his work of destruction. Here the relationship between the two is the same as that between the Lord and us. In the very first stanza he is mentioned, along with *Vishṇu* and *Brahma* ('*Hari-Hara-Virincha*') among those who worship her. It is very clear that

for him she is like God. Some stanzas later (*Ślōka. 7*) she is *Śiva*'s '*Āhōpurushikā*', that is his awareness of himself, which is more or less in keeping with the idea expressed in the first stanza. In the next stanza (8), she makes him fully her equal in the aspect of *Kāmēśvarā*. She herself as his wife *Kāmēśvarī* is seated on his lap - the words '*Paramaśiva-paryanka-nilayam*' are used here. The twin manifestations of the *Saguṇa* Brahman, the two are queen-empress and king-emperor and the authorities of the Panchakruthya functions - i.e. with two more functions added to the usual three. In the next stanza (9) she alone is regarded as the *Saguṇa* Brahman and is absorbed in him, the *Nirguṇa* Brahman: '*sahasrārē padmē saha rahasi pathyā viharasē*' ('in the sahasrāra lotus you sport in secret with your husband'). Another stanza (11) mentions how they are together in the *Srīchakra*: in it four chakras are his and five hers. She is *pathivrathā* supreme, revealing her beauty fully only to her husband. But eleven or twelve stanzas subsequent to this (23), the *Āchāryā* 'charge-sheets' *Ambālī* with robbing *Siva*'s entire body, not satisfied as she is with stealing half of it.

I must speak in some detail about the next stanza (24). In the second stanza the *Āchāryā* refers to Brahma, *Vishṇu* and Rudra performing their respective functions. Here too he deals with the subject : '*Jagathsūthē dhāthā*', *Brahmā* gives birth to this world; '*Hariravati*', *Vishṇu* protects; '*Rudrah kshapayathē*', Rudra destroys. The *Āchāryā* mentions the two remaining of the Panchakruthya functions and the deities in charge of them. One of the two remaining deities is *Īśvarā*. '*Īsasthirayathi*', *Īsa* does the function of veiling with *Māyā*. '*Īsa*' and '*Īśvarā*' are the same, the Lord who rules. As a matter of fact he is only one among the 'officers' for the Panchakruthya. The true yajamān, mistress, is *Parāśakthi*. It is she who appoints the five officers of her kingdom and makes them work.

'Making them work' does not mean issuing circulars or 'memos' or giving oral orders. A maharajni would not bother to do such things. It would be enough if she makes a slight sign and the office would start working with alacrity. She flickers her brows for a moment, her brows which are like creepers, '*kshanachalithayōh bhrūlathikayoh*'. Taking it for her command, '*ājnāmālambya*', the Panchakruthya deities hasten to perform their functions.

In spite of all the pomp and circumstance of royalty, her position here is a notch lower than what it is as described in the first stanza in which she is said to be worshipped even by the *Thrimūrthi*. There she is the Supreme Being and the *Thrimūrthi* and other gods are her devotees. Here, great queen though she is, kowtowed to even by the same deities, the relationship between them is that of a ruler and her attendants or servants. Is not the position of the Supreme Being worshipped by devotees superior to that of a queen served by her courtiers and attendants?

One such attendant is *Īsvara* who is in charge of *thirōdhana* or veiling. The name '*Īsvarā*' suggests that he is a big deity. 'Am I not the one who performs the function of keeping the entire world with the *Thrimūrthi* bound to *Māyā*?' so he must be feeling and that is why his name is such as to suggest that he is an important deity. 'Thiraskurvan ēthath,' that he brings even the *Thrimūrthi* under *Māyā* is mentioned in the stanza. Moreover, not aware of what he does, he veils himself with the power of *Māyā*, conceals himself - '*svamapi vapuh Īsasthirayathi*.'

The power and ability he possesses are *Ambāl's* gift. She indeed is true *Īsvari*. There is no justification for *Īsvara* to call himself by the name. But *Ambāl* in her magnanimity has let him do so.

The fifth 'official' performs the function of granting blessings (anugraha). 'After seeing the example of *Īsvarā*, is he

going to adopt a name to suggest that he is a step even higher?’ so *Ambāl* thought. ‘He may adopt a name that shows he is superior even to me. There is nothing higher than I. If there is anyone equal to me it is *Śiva*, my husband, and we two are above all those performing the five functions. I wonder whether the fifth official is going to have his (that is *Śiva*’s) name?’ So she called him, the fifth official, and said to him, ‘Listen, choose a name for yourself. But make sure that it is not a name of *Śiva*.’

There was a Vaishṇava landowner who was very devoted to *Perumāḷ* [meaning here *Vishṇu* or a Vaishṇava deity]. One of the labourers working on his farm was an ‘untouchable’.

The landowner one day asked him : ‘What’s your name, man?’ ‘*Perumāḷu*,’ replied the labourer.

The landowner wondered how he could call his servant ‘*Perumāḷ*’ and asked him to change his name.

The man said that it was not easy to do it. He had to approach the village headman’s office, pay a fee, and then sacrifice a goat or fowl to his god. All this would cost a pretty sum. The landowner agreed to pay all the expenses and gave him the cash needed. All he wanted was that he should not be put in the position of calling his servant ‘*Perumāḷ*’.

When the labourer returned after having changed his name, the landowner asked him : ‘What’s your new name?’ ‘*Pedhdha Perumāḷ*,’ was the reply.

‘*Pedhdha*’ in Telugu means ‘big’. So ‘*Pedhdha Perumāḷ*’ means ‘Big *Perumāḷ*.’ There is a saying: ‘After *Perumāḷ*, *Pedhdha Perumāḷ*.’

In the language of [Tamil] *Vaishṇavas* the term ‘*Perumāḷ kōvil*’ means or stands for *Kāñchīpuram*. The word ‘*Kōvil*’ alone signifies Srirangam. But *Vaishṇavas* call Sri Ranganatha (the deity

of Srirangam) '*Periya Perumāl*' ('*Periya*' is Tamil for 'big'.) There is a reference in the *Thiruppugazh* to this deity, '*Periya Perumāl Arangara*'. '*Periya Perumāl*' and '*Pedhdha Perumāl*' are the same. The Tamil land was for long under Telugu rule, so many Telugu words came into use in Tamil. '*Pedhdha*' is one such word.

I have told the story in the context of *Ambāl* asking the 'official' in charge of anugraha or blessings to call himself by a name other than that of '*Śiva*'.

The *Āchāryā* mentions the name this 'official' gave himself: *Sadāpūrvaśiva*, meaning '*Śiva* with the prefix *Sadā*', that is '*Sadāśiva*.' But why does the *Āchāryā*, instead of stating simply '*Sadāśiva*', say '*Śiva* with the prefix *Sadā*'? Out of mischief! [Or a sense of fun.] *Ambāl* is *Amma*, Mother, and there is a certain charm in teasing her about some matter or other. She had asked the 'official' in charge of blessings to choose for himself a name other than *Śiva*. But what did he do? He deceived *Ambāl* by choosing the name *Sadāśiva*; not plain *Śiva*, but *Sadāśiva*, that is 'Always *Śiva*'. And when one is Always *Śiva* how can the name be changed? The *Āchāryā* wanted to tell the story of how *Ambāl* was tricked and give it a mischievous twist. He wanted to tell it in a subtle and oblique manner so that the reader would be left wondering about 'how it could be like this' [the reference is to the term the *Āchāryā* uses. '*Sadā-pūrva-Śiva*' instead of simply '*Sadāśiva*']. His idea was that the reader should be made to find an explanation for it himself. That would give the story added literary flavour and make a deep impression on the minds of readers. The *Āchāryā* mentions the names of the Panchakruthya 'officials' one by one and, as he comes to the one in charge of blessings... If the name of *Sadāśiva* were mentioned matter-of-factly it would not make any impression on the minds of readers and so he uses the term '*Sadā-pūrva-Śiva*' in order to rivet the attention of readers on the name. With their attention specially drawn to the name they

would inquire into its meaning and would find out for themselves how *Ambāl* was thricked by the 'official' in charge of blessings [that is the one who chose to call himself *Sadāsiva*].

What I wished to tell you was the various ways in which the relationship between *Ambāl* and *Swāmī* are expressed. Here (in Stanza 24) the *Āchāryā* mentions that *Ambāl* is the yajamāni or mistress of *Śiva* in his forms of Rudra (one of the Trinity), *Īśvara* and *Sadāsiva* who became her attendants. In the next stanza he expresses the common belief that the *Thrimūrthi* who perform the three functions (creation, sustenance and dissolution) represent the three *guṇas* (sathtva, rajas and thamas) He takes up this idea found in the first stanza and says : 'To worship you is to worship them also because their heads are placed at your feet. Keeping their hands folded above their heads they prostrate themselves at your feet. Those folded hands are like flowers placed at your feet. The flowers offered at your feet will also fall on those flowers (hands of the *Thrimūrthi*). So the *pūjā* performed to your feet is *pūjā* performed to the heads and hands of the *Thrimūrthi*.' Thus the worshippers (the *Thrimūrthi*) become the worshipped. Here too Rudra, an aspect of *Śiva*, is a devotee of *Ambāl*, and she is in the relation of the Supreme Being for him.

We may speak of *Śiva* as her child also. This is how it is ...

'*Thrayāṇām dēvanām thriguṇa janithāṇām thava Śivē*,' says the *Āchāryā*. He uses the word '*Śiva*' significantly. The *Māndūkya Upanishad* speaks of '*Śivam chaturtham*'. '*Chaturatham*' is the state of the Brahman which is beyond the three *guṇas* and it is called '*thurīya*'. When the Brahman is *Śivam* it is quiescent, without any function, and when it is *Śiva* it is functioning. '*Śivam*' is not attached to the three *guṇas*. It is the *Chithsakthi*, the power of consciousness, and it arises as iccha or desire and becomes *Kāmesvarī* to generate the three *guṇas*. The three deities who perform the three functions (creation, sustenance and dissolution)

are also generated from these *guṇas*. 'Thava thriguṇa janithānām' - 'the *Thrimūrthi* are born of your three *guṇas*', which means born of her. She is the janani, mother, of the *Thrimūrthi*. As a philosophical concept also *Ambālī* is regarded as the Mother of *Swāmī*, *Śiva*. Even those who find philosophical concepts hard to understand will find this easy : 'the three *guṇas* are born of the root or fundamental force, aren't they? The three *mūrthi*s are their embodiment. The root force then must be Mother.'

[There is a smile on the Great Guru's face as he continues...] We may even say that *Ambālī* is the grandmother of the *Thrimūrthi*. Many have spoken of her as Mother. What nobody has said I am telling you. The three *guṇas* were first born as the offspring of the *Thuriya-Parāśakti*. And the *Thrimūrthi* are born of those three *guṇas* as the *Āchāryā* says, 'thriguṇa -janithānām'. So does it not mean that they are *Ambālī*'s grandchildren? Thus there is this relationship also between Rudra-*Śiva* and *Ambālī*.

In the next stanza (26) it is mentioned that, when all deities perish during the great deluge, *Śiva* keeps sporting with *Ambālī*. The Panchakruthya deities also perish during this time. *Samhāra-Rudra* (the Rudra responsible for the dissolution), also perishes: it is the great samhāra in which the *Samhāra-Rudra* also comes to an end. This is brought about directly by *Parāśakti*. It is the time when she puts a stop to her sport and brings to an end the dualistic cosmos. Where is the room or need now for the function of veiling or of granting blessings. So those regarded as equal to *Śiva* (Rudra, *Maheśvara* and *Sadāśiva*) are also to perish. The *Pancha-Brahmāsana* of *Ambālī* is also called the *Panchaprēthāsana*. It is she who appoints the five deities and gives them the power to carry out their duties. If she does not do so they are like prethas, corpses; hence the name '*Panchaprēthāsana*', which term I have already explained to you. The time of the great destruction is the time when the five 'officials' are not given any duties to perform.

'*Śivākārē manchē Paramaśiva paryanka nīlayam*' - this line occurs in an earlier stanza (8). On the *PanchaBrahmāsana* or *Paramaśiva* keeps *Ambāl* on his lap. The *Kāmēśvarā* referred to here is the same as the *Paramaśiva* figuring in the above-mentioned stanza. The *Āchāryā* shows the two as a couple happily sporting together (Stanza 26). Why should they be happy now, what joy do they find in *samhāra* or destruction? Although outwardly dissolution appears to be an act of cruelty, it is actually an act of kindness since, through it, *Kāmēśvarā* and *Kāmēśvarī* free all creatures, millions and trillions of their children, from karma and draw them unto themselves. Is it not a matter for joy?

An idea occurs to me now. The *Āchāryā* says, addressing *Ambāl*, '*Mahā samhārē'smin viharathi Sathi thvathpathirasau*': 'during the time of the great destruction your husband sports.' '*viharaṇā*' means delighting oneself in sport, sporting together. It is in this sense that I spoke to you so far about the word. This word '*viharaṇā*' itself has the meaning of *samhāra*, destruction. '*Haraṇā*', '*apaharaṇā*', '*samhāraṇā*', '*viharaṇā*', '*apahāra*', '*vihāra*', all these words could be used as synonyms for *samhāra*. It seems to me that the words '*thvathpathih viharathi*' could be taken to mean that *Kāmēśvarā* alone, without being associated with *Kāmēśvarī*, performs the *mahā-samhāra*. There are no words in the stanza to suggest that he performs the sport of dissolution with *Ambāl*, nor is there reason to believe that he sports with *Ambāl* - there is no reference to any dissolution. The words only mean that 'during the *mahā-samhāra* your husband performs *viharaṇā*' '*mahāsamhārē'smin viharathi Sathi thvathpathirasau*.' So there is plenty of room to construe the line to mean that it is he, *Kāmēśvarā*, who performs the great destruction.

If I interpret the stanza thus it is only to speak in favour of *Ambāl*, to see that she gets a good name! 'What appears outwardly as an act of cruelty, the great dissolution, is not performed by her.'

Although the arrangement is hers, the execution is not, not the Mother's. After all, it is the execution that is apparently cruel. So far, *Kāmēśvarā* has been a king only in name, but in bringing about the end of creation he receives the necessary authority. If I interpreted the stanza in the way I did, it was to show that it was he who carried out the destruction. My intention was that *Ambāl* should thereby earn a good name. I have in this matter the support of the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam*. So nobody can complain that I have interpreted the stanza the way I like. What does the *Sahasranāmam* say in this context? '*Mahēśvara-mahākālpa-mahātāṇḍava-sākshinī*' '*Mahākālpa-mahātāṇḍava*' may be taken to mean the great dance of *Mahēśvara* at the time of the deluge following the completion of so many kalpas. Or we may take it to mean the great dance of the deluge, 'planned' by *Mahēśvara*. 'Kalpana' is not what we take it to mean, 'imagination'. It is something done after careful planning. So we may take it that it is *Mahēśvara* himself who creates the great deluge. Also he is not to be understood here as the deity of *thirōdhana* or veiling. In this context such a meaning is not appropriate. The name means one who is great and lordly. '*Mahēśvara-mahātāṇḍava-sākshinī*' thus means that *Ambāl* is a mere witness to *Mahēśvara* sporting during the great deluge.

Altogether this is a new and interesting relationship between *Ambāl* and *Īsvarā*, contrary to the generally understood one. What is it that is generally believed to be the relationship between the two? *Ambāl* is the one who functions and he is a mere witness, the embodiment of the Self. Here he is the active power and she the passive witness.

Of the three functions (creation, sustenance, destruction), Rudra performs destruction. Ironically enough, during his act of destruction he himself is destroyed. Then, with regard to the five functions, Panchakruthya, *Śīva* is the functioning power, *Ambāl*

being a mere witness. This we know from the great Chidambaram temple, the foremost among *Śaiva* shrines. Nataraja it is who performs the five functions through his Panchakruthya-paramananda-*thāṇḍavas*. He is indeed raja, a sovereign monarch, and he keeps dancing away as an awesome exercise encompassing everything. *Parāśakthi*, with her power withdrawn, remains serene and almost obscure. All the importance here is Nataraja's and the god is referred to here as 'Ayyā'. The opposite is the case in Mad(h)urai (at the Mīnākshi temple) where it is all '*Ammā*'. She is the first to be offered *pūjā*, and naivedya and he (Sundarēśvara) is in the background. 'Is it Chidambaram or Madurai here?' we often hear this question asked, the purpose of which is to find out who manages the household, ['who is the boss?'] the wife or the husband.

I was speaking about the various types of relationship existing between *Śiva* and *Ambāl* as described in the *Saundaryalaharī*. In it a view contrary to the generally held opinion is found, that is of *Śiva* performing the function of dissolution and *Ambāl* being a mere witness to it : he is actor and she is spectator. This is suggested by the words, '*mahā-samhārē smin viharathi Sathi thvathpathirasau.*'

In another place the *Āchāryā* says that *Ambāl* sports with her husband, '*pathyā viharasē*' (Stanza 9)

'Sahasrārē padmē saha rahasi pathyā viharasē.'

When a yogi rouses his Kundalini power, chakra after chakra, from the *mūlādhara* upward to the crown of his head, the *Śakthi* that is *Ambāl* will be manifested completely and *Devī* will sport with her husband (in the *sahasrāra* lotus). That is what the *Āchāryā* tells us, that *Śiva* and *Śakthi* become united here-and it is the final stage of involution. With it the *jīvāthmā* and the *Paramāthmā* become one and liberation is achieved. In this way,

without seeming to be cruel like in the act of destruction (*samhāra*) even outwardly, the Mother, full of joy, pours amrutha (into the devotee's being) and then this amrutha instead of being a flow becomes an experience (for the devotee-yōgi) and he himself becomes amrutha, that is he becomes immortal. It is at this time that the Mother, full of love, is said to indulge in sport. We may take it that the *Āchāryā* has spoken of *Śivam* sporting at the time of destruction.

The relationship between *Śiva* and *Ambāl* is also that between guru and *sisya*. *Śiva* is the guru and *Ambāl* the disciple. He teaches her the ways of worship known as the *Āgamas*, the *Thanthras* and the *Samhithās*. She is *Jnānāmbika* herself, the goddess of *jnāna*, but it is to proclaim to the world the importance of vidhya or learning, to make known that her husband is guru to a woman, that she receives instruction from *Śiva*. This relationship is also dealt with in the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 31). There are said to be 64 thanthras. The subject is not mentioned in a direct manner. Stating everything in a novel way is a speciality of the *Saundaryalaharī*. The *Āchāryā* speaks thus, addressing *Ambāl*: 'The *Swāmī* taught all the 64 thanthras, making one perfect in each and after wards he kept silent. You saw it and thought to yourself, 'How is it that, after teaching our children all the 64 thanthras, each yielding a particular fruit, he has not instructed them in the thanthra of *Srividhyopāśana*, the *Samayāchāra* Thanthra, which yields all fruits including dharma, artha, *kāma* and *mōksha*? Though they do bring benefits in the spheres of dharma, artha, *kāma* and *mōksha*, its chief value is that it translates all external *pūjā* into inward worship and paves the way of the devotee to Self-realisation by making the inner organs (*anthah-Kārāṇas*) absorbed in the *Āthma*. He has locked up the thanthra without revealing it to children [all of us] and sealed his mouth himself. How unjust it is.' Then she compelled *Śiva* to teach their children her thanthra. (So the *Āchāryā* states in Stanza 31.) He uses the word 'nirbandha' in

this context: 'punasthvannirbandhād...' ('Nirbandha' means compulsion. *Ambāl* compelled *Śiva* to teach the *Śrīvidhya* thanthra.)

Śiva, who had remained rooted in his own state of Brahman was drawn into sport by *Ambāl*. And then he was deeply involved in it. No other entity had been so still as he had been and now he executes a dance that makes the whole cosmos vibrate, tremble : it is the dance of joy. It is the *Panchakruthya-paramānanda-thāṇḍava*. The *sambhāra thāṇḍava* (dance of destruction) is different: it is also a dance to which the *Mahā-Parāśakthi* is a mere witness. There are seven types of dance : *ajapā*, *kukkuta* and so on. Apart from these there are nine other types called *Navathāṇḍava*, dances of great vigour and power, almost uproarious. In addition, there are many other sports of his: *bhikshātana* (wandering as a mendicant), *Thripura-dhahana* (the burning of Thripura), the slaying of Jalandhara. For the 64 kinds of sport he manifests himself in 64 aspects. In the city of Mad(h)urai alone he has shown himself engaged in these 64 kinds of sport. He indulges in all these sports and, without allowing people to become freed from their own sport, from the dualistic world, and advance to the state of liberation, he stops with teaching the 64 thanthras that yield varied benefits (but not final release).

It was then that, in her supreme compassion, the Mother said to *Paramaśiva*: 'Keep dancing, *Swāmī*. But can my children do the same? Even if they are made to dance, you must make their dance (all their worldly activities) a way to the undoing of their karma and an aid to the purification of their consciousness. And then you must lead them to the path of *jñāna* and open to them the gateway to my worship which will in the end make them still and quiescent.' [The *Mahā-swāmī* raises his voice and speaks the words of *Ambāl*...] 'Will you do it? I will not leave you without your doing it.' Thus she compelled her husband to teach the world

the *Śrīvidhya* thanthra. He had kept it under lock and key, so to speak, because he was reluctant to impart such a great work as '*Ambāl Thanthra*' to an unregenerate world. But because of *Ambāl*'s persistence he had no choice but to teach the world that thanthra also.

Though it is a discipline that deals with her own worship, she did not want to reveal it to the world herself and wanted her husband and guru to do it. This showed her *pāthivrathya* and devotion as a wife and disciple, but in her anxiety that all of us her children must obtain that supreme means of liberation, she departed from her duty as a *pāthivratha* and disciple and used compulsion to make her husband reveal the thanthra to the world. Here she demonstrates that, above her duty as wife and disciple, is her affection as a Mother for her children.

Among the many distinguishing features of the Samaya (*Śrīvidhya*) Thanthra is this : it closely follows the *Vēdhic* tradition. All thanthras are adapted to the *Vēdhic* way. It is also wrong to speak separately of the two ways or margas, the *Vēdhic* and the thanthrik. However there are many customs in the thanthras that are not entirely *Vēdhic* and are said to be different from the *Vēdhic* discipline. It was our *Āchāryā* who esthablished the *Vēdhic* mode of worship in its pristine form and with all its vitality. In the *Vēdhic pūjā* also manthras used in thanthrik worship form a part. If there are manthras like *Sīva-Panchākshari* that are clearly mentioned in the *Vēdhās* there are others that are not so explicitly stated but all the same hinted at or indicated in the *Vēdhic* texts. Thus when the *Āchāryā* wanted to esthablish the *Vēdhic* mode of worship in *Śrīvidhyōpāsana* he relied on *Samayāchāra* for it.

The *Āchāryā* calls it *Ambāl*'s own thanthra: '*the thanthram*'. He says: 'You compelled *Śīva* to reveal the thanthra to the world,

and you succeeded in your efforts. The irony of it is that in many of the ways in which *Ambāl* is worshipped, *Śiva*'s place is secondary to her own or even inferior to hers. It is in *Samayāchāra*, which is regarded as '*Ambāl*'s own thanthra' that the two have equal importance. That *Ambāl* does not accept as her own those thanthras in which she is accorded a more exalted place than *Śiva* and accepts as hers thanthras that regard her and her husband as equal shows her *pāthivrathya*.

Śiva, equal in importance to her as her husband; a husband only in name; *Śiva*, her guru or official appointed by her (and subservient to her); her *dāsa*, devotee, son (I have extended the relationship to that of grandson); she half his body; she also takes (or steals) all his body; she is protection for *Śiva*'s very life. In this '*Ānandalahari*' section are mentioned *Śiva* and the deities who are equivalent to him and their relations with *Ambāl* are depicted in various ways.

However, the most important feature of this section is the *Śrīvidhya*; thanthra. Two manthras occurring in the thanthra are also seen here. Some believe that the two stanzas (32 and 33) constitute the life-breath of this section ('*Ānandalahari*'). If the latter part of the hymn is devoted to a depiction of *Ambāl*'s physical traits, this part presents her in the '*akhshara svarūpa*' (as an embodiment of letters). In the sense that deities have two forms, physical or bodily form and sound form, the latter part of the hymn represents the physical form and this (the first part) represents the sound form. The one is the *dhrūsyarūpa*, seen with the eye; the other is the *sravyarūpa*, perceived by the ear. The superiority of the *sabdarūpa* or sound form is this: it is from the sound form that the physical form came into being. The sound form is elevated over the other form in that if you recite the verses that express her sound form her physical form will make its presence felt before us.

If we can come by the physical form through the sound form, it means the sound form is a means to obtain the physical form. The physical form is thus the goal and in that respect superior to the other form. If we say that the physical form arises from the sound form, it means it is the fruit yielded by the sound form and in this way also superior to the other. I don't know what I will say on other occasions. When we take up the section called '*Saundaryalaharī*' the beauty of *Ambāl*'s physical form earns full marks.

As the *Āchāryā* concludes the first section, after dealing with various philosophical concepts, he brings before us the universal Father and Mother-Janaka (Father) and then Jananī (Mother). In that Mother, all thanthras and all truths find their fulfillment. A child first recognises its mother's face, its mother's form. There are so many colours in Nature, green, red, and so on. A child is happy to see these colours. But the happiness it derives from looking at its mother's face is far more. So, after finally speaking of the *Jagajjananī*, the Universal Mother, the *Āchāryā* keeps aside all philosophical concepts and commences his depiction of Mother, from her head to her feet.

It is here that the '*Saundaryalaharī*' section begins, the *āchāryā*'s portrayal of *Ambāl*, the section in which we see *Ambāl*'s beauty flowing as a flood, wave after wave.

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CHANDRA-SŪRYA-MAULĪŚVARĪ

Right at the start of the '*Saundaryalaharī*' section, in describing *Ambāl*'s crown, the *Āchāryā* pours out his ideas born of his unique imagination, ideas that touch the heights of poetry. We see poetic fancy and the flow of words that combine majesty with sweetness, the effulgence of the incandescent sun and the cool of

the radiant moon. The stanza (42) performs the function of adorning *Ambāl*'s head with the sun and the moon.

Gathair-māṇikyā thvam gaganamanibhih sāndhraghatitham
Kīrītam thē haimam Himagirisuthē kīrthayathi yah
Sa nidēyacchāyācch uraṇa-sabalam Chandra-sakalam
Dhanuh saunāsīram kimithi na nibadhnāthi dhishhānām

A style in which the words come like the current of a stream, or like a flow of honey, a style in which enchanting ideas are expressed in simple and elegant words, is called '*Vaidarbhī rīthī*' (*Vaidarbhī* style) in Sanskrit. In early times poets in that area [Vidarbha, now part of Maharashtra] must have been proficient in that style. '*Gaudī rīthī*' is the style that must have originated in *Gaudadeśa* or Bengal. The writing in this style is somewhat pompous and is not easily understood. In the *Saundaryalaharī* there is a mixture of the two styles. In the previous stanza *Ambāl* was brought close to us (as an affectionate Mother with whom we are familiar). Now with the commencement of the second part of the hymn, the style is somewhat grandiose because the *Āchāryā* is anxious that the majesty and greatness of *Ambāl* must not go unnoticed. The ideas expressed are also complex. The beginning of the section thus suggests the waves coming in a rush.

Just as the Ganga which, tumbling down from the celestial world, became placid after it had been caught in the matted locks of *Siva*, the *Āchāryā*'s poetic style becomes more serene after the grand manner in which he depicts *Ambāl*'s head or crown (in the opening stanza).

I said *Ambāl*'s head was adorned by the sun and the moon. That she is *Chandrasekharī* was mentioned earlier. The idea that she is also *Sūryasekharī* is new. And it is not just one sun that adorns her head but twelve suns.

Śiva who is well known as *Chandrasekhara* is also called *Sūryasekhara*. *Bhānuśekhara*—nowadays the name appears as ‘*Bhanuśekar*’—also means the same. In many *Śiva* temples the rays of the rising sun fall on the head of the *linga*: *Śiva* thus may be said to be *Sūryasekhara*.

There are two *Śiva* temples in Thanjavur district and they are called ‘*Thalaijnāyiru*’ (meaning, literally, ‘Sun on the Head’]. It is because the sun’s rays fall on the *Śivalinga* that these temples have the name of ‘*Thalaijnayiru*’, so it is said.

The word ‘*nabhōmanī*’ or ‘*gaganamanī*’ means a jewel in the sky. ‘*Gaganamanī*’ appears here in its plural form as ‘*Gaganamanībhiḥ*’.

The sun round which our earth and other planets revolve is one among many. There are not only many suns other than our own but also many galaxies other than ours. The *Śāsthras* speak of ‘*Dvādhasādhityas*’, twelve suns. The *Āchāryā* says that the crown of *Ambāl*, who is the creator of the cosmos, is encrusted with the twelve suns. ‘*Sāndram ghatitham*’ means ‘closely set’. The first line of the stanza thus speaks of *Ambāl* being ‘*Sūryasekharī*’.

The stanza describing *Ambāl* begins in a dazzling manner (with reference to the sun) but in the second line, in contrast to the warmth and effulgence suggested by it, is the pleasant coolness denoted by the name ‘*Himagirisuthe*’.

Since *Ambāl* has been described first as *Kāmēsvarī*, a lustrous red in colour like a thousand rising suns, the *Āchāryā* now calls her *Pārvathī*, daughter of the mountain of snow, so green and fresh to look at (and therefore cool to the eye). Towards the end of the hymn (in Stanza 96) the *Āchāryā* addressing *Sathī-Pārvathī*’s previous incarnation as daughter of Daksha—says: ‘*Thava Sathī sathinam acharamē*’. *Sathī* (*Ambāl*) offers her body in the fire of the sacrifice performed by Daksha. Instead of being reduced to

ashes, she is born as *Pārvathī* possessing the colour of green which colour represents the very substance of life. From the mound of fire she went directly to the mountain of snow and took the form of tender green. During the debate *Jnānasambāndhar* had with the Jains, the palm-leaf on which his *Thēvāram* hymn was inscribed was put in the fire but instead of being burned it remained fresh: it was similar to how *Sathī* became *Pārvathī*. After suggesting the heat of the sun in the earlier line, the *Āchāryā* creates coolness by addressing *Ambāl* as the daughter of the mountain of snow. The feeling of coolness is further enhanced when he brings in '*chandra-sākalam*', the crescent moon, which pours out its cool nectarine rays.

Ambāl's crown, which has the crescent moon, is made of gold, '*haiman kirītam*'. '*Hēmam*' means gold; '*haimam*' is that which is made of gold, or golden. '*Himam*' also means snow. *Ambāl* is '*Himagirisuthā*', daughter of the mountain of snow. In the *Kēnōpanishad*, *Ambāl* appears as the embodiment of Brahmadevidhya to teach Indra. There she is referred to as '*Haimavathi*'. The *Āchāryā* uses the word in two senses: as the daughter of the mountain of snow and as one possessing the brightness of gold. Here, in this verse of the '*Saundaryalaharī*' section, intending to allude to *Ambāl*'s connection with the Upanishads, he mentions both '*Himagiri*' and '*Hēmam*'. Not only that. In the *Kēnōpanishad* *Ambāl* teaches Indra Brahmadevidhya ; here Indra's bow is mentioned, that is Indradhanus, the rainbow - '*dhanuh Śaunāsīram*'.

The words '*haimam-hima*' occur consecutively (in the second line); in the next line we have '*sabalam (chandra) sākalam*'. Alliterations abound in the hymn.

Ambāl's crown which is encrusted with suns for rubies has the crescent moon on it. The moon is far smaller than the sun. But here it is mentioned that the suns studding the crown are small

stones, while the crescent moon adorning the same crown is much bigger, like a slice of ash-gourd. The moon exudes both nectar and snow (coolness). Here we have the word 'himakarah', one who creates snow, coolness.. Four or five stanzas subsequently (46) occurs the words 'rākā-himakarah' that is the full moon, but here the reference is to the crescent moon, that of the third day of the bright half of the month, and it is shaped like a bow. Its light is scattered as snowfall. The glow of the rubies that are the suns falls on the moonlight, 'nīdēyacchāyā': 'nida' means a crown shaped like a bird's nest. The radiance of the jewels falling on it means the light of the sun. What happens when sunlight falls on a raincloud? A rainbow is formed, is it not? There is nothing more beautiful in Nature than a rainbow with its seven colours. When the light of the gems that are the suns on *Ambāl*'s crown gild the moonlight there is refraction resulting in the seven colours: the idea is that the crescent moon is made to look like a rainbow.

'The moon is a satellite and not self-luminous. Moonlight is produced by sunlight falling on it.' This is the lesson of science. The lesson of poetry is different. When sunlight falls on the self-luminous moon a rainbow is created and there is a magical display of colours. The great poet that the *Āchāryā* is, he has displayed creative imagination of a high order by pointing to the rainbow that is the crescent moon on *Ambikā*'s head. You keep looking at the rainbow again and again and its beauty and the sense of coolness it gives you is such that you can never be satiated by it. Though the idea is great, the *Āchāryā* himself does not think that it has occurred to him alone. For he asks: 'Who cannot but liken it to the rainbow, the wonderful colours created by the lustre of the jewels on your crown falling on the crescent moon?' '*Saunāsīram dhanuh ithi dhishanām kim na nibadhnāthi*': the words of the fourth line of the stanza in prose order. 'How can this idea of the rainbow (the light of the suns on the crown of *Ambāl* falling on the light of the

crescent moon) not be included in poetry?' 'Yah kīrthayathi' in the second line means 'whoever describes'. The Āchāryā observes that any poet, great or ordinary, cannot but express such an idea (comparison with the rainbow) in his poem. At the very start of the 'Saundaryalaharī' section of the hymn the Āchāryā shows his humility, a characteristic of his that we see throughout.

Indra is the presiding deity of rain. Thunder is caused by his wielding his *vajrāyudha* [thunderbolt, adamantite weapon]. His bow is the rainbow, 'Indradhanus'. 'Saunāsīram dhanuh' means the same. Indra came to be called 'Śunāsīra' from the fact that he always fights standing in front of his army. The name is included in the *Amarakōsam*.

All this creation and its activities, which are the result of *Parāśakti's* appearance from the *Nirguṇa Brahman*, may be compared to the many colours formed by the refraction of white light. The idea occurs in the very first stanza that depicts the beauty of *Ambāl*.

We may take it that what is said in the stanza is not refraction but reflection. The light of the suns (on *Ambāl's* crown), impinging upon the crescent moon, must have divided itself into many colours in the dewdrops oozing from it (from the crescent moon). It is also likely that the many suns are many colours and that their light reflected by the crescent moon produces a rainbow.

Thus in the very first stanza of the section devoted to a depiction of *Ambāl's* physical form, the Āchāryā points to the sun and the moon on her head - the sun and the moon that provide sustenance to the entire world - and brings the goddess face to face with us, for our *dharsan*, as *Chandra-Śūrya-maulīśvarī*. She wears the crown as the queen-empress of all the three worlds and has the sun and the moon on that very crown.

Ambāl appears before us thus in all her regal splendour. But even as the queen that she is, one is reminded, as mentioned in an earlier stanza (34), of her motherly quality. In that stanza the *Āchāryā* says that she suckles the world with her breasts of the sun and the moon: '*śaśimihira-vakshōruhayugam.*'

Although a number of suns are mentioned here, instead of just one, the moon has greater importance since they (the suns) shed their light on it. In other words, what is of significance is the fact that the World Mother is revealed to us as *Chandramaulīśvarī* (the goddess with the moon on her crown).

The five lingas that the *Āchāryā* received from *Īśvara* have a common name : each is called '*Chandramaulīśvara*'. I have already told you the story that the *Saundaryalaharī* was obtained by him at the same time and that *Nandikēśvara* snatched away from him a part of the text. I further said that the *Āchāryā* completed the hymn by composing the missing part himself that is from the 42nd to the 100th stanza. I observed, besides, that just as *Chandramaulīśvara* is *Īśvara*'s own form, the *Saundaryalaharī* is *Ambāl* in hymnal form. So it is extremely appropriate that the opening stanza (of the second part of the hymn) describes her as *Chandramaulīśvarī*.

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THE BLACK THAT DISPELS DARKNESS

The *Āchāryā*'s description of *Ambāl*'s crown [he begins the previous stanza with it] is itself like a stream of light illumining the cosmos. But, as he goes further in the stanza, he gives the impression of wearing 'cooling' glasses [sun glasses] by mentioning the mountain of snow, the cool moon and concluding with the rainbow that comes with the season of rains. In the next stanza (43) there is a total change and it is devoted to a description of *Ambāl*'s utterly black tresses of hair.

Dhunōthu dhvāntham nasthulitha-dalithēndhīvara-vanam
Ghana snigdha-slakshṇam chikura-nikurumbam thava Śivē
Yadhīyam saurabhyam sahajam upalabdhum sumanasō
Vasanthyasmin manyē valamathana-vātī-vitapinām

The Āchāryā addresses *Ambāl* as 'Śivē', that is by her highly auspicious name. '*Dhvāntham dhunōthu*' means, 'May it dispel darkness.'

'The crown has been described by the Āchāryā as being all radiance. From where does darkness come now?'

The reference here is not to outward but to inner darkness, to *ajñāna* or nescience that keeps everybody in a whirl. In one of the earlier stanzas (3) he refers to this darkness, '*avidhyānām anthasthimiram*'.

'*Dhunōthu Dhvāntham nah*': 'nah' means our(s). The Āchāryā prays on behalf of all of us saying, 'May the darkness of the nescience of all of us be dispelled.' As for him, he was the light of *jñāna*. Even a shadow of ignorance would not cross him. But he prays for all of us; he prays with us. And the next stanza he starts by saying, '*Thanōthu kshēmam nah*?' ('May all of us be granted well-being'.)

'How, according to the Āchāryā, is the darkness of nescience to be dispelled? Is it by *Ambāl*'s radiant form? No.' The answer is in the second line of the verse: '*Thava chikura nikurumbam*'. 'Thava' means 'your' that is *Ambāl*'s; 'chikuram' is 'hair'; 'nikurumbam' is dense mass of any object. So 'chikura-nikurumbam' means densely grown tresses of hair. The Āchāryā says that *Ambāl*'s tresses of black hair must dispel our darkness.

Hair itself is dark. So does it not create darkness? *Ambāl* must have appeared even before Time but it would be wrong to think for that reason that her hair must be white because she is aged and that for that reason it would dispel darkness. But the fact

is the celestials do not age and *Ambāl* is the queen-empress of all celestials. How can she ever age?

She does not have the body of the middle-aged. Though she is the mother of all the worlds, physically she still looks a girl-child, a *kanya*, so tender and delicate is her body. 'Mother', you have given birth to millions and millions of universes and you are still what the *Vēdhās* call you, a *kanyā*, beautiful and an embodiment of bliss.'

The statement is based on proper authority. The *Vēdhās* speak of the *Gāyathrī* specific to various deities and in the *Gāyathrī* pertaining to Durgā Paramēśvari occurs the name 'Kanyākumari'.

That being so [she being a *kanya*] *Ambāl*'s hair must be black. The *Āchāryā* has also described her without any room for doubt on this point: 'Thulitha-dalitha-indhīvaravanam'. We must change the order thus: 'Dalithaindhīvara-vana-thulitha.' It means that *Ambāl*'s 'hair is like a forest of indhinara flowers'. It is a glossy black. '*Ghana-snigdha-slakshṇam*'. 'Ghana' may be taken to mean 'like a raincloud'. *Krishṇa* is called '*Ghana-syām*'; here 'ghana' means like a raincloud. Or we may take it to mean thickly grown. 'Snigdham' = made glossy with the application of oil. We say 'snēha' and '*snēhitha*': these words are derived from the root word 'snik'. Oil is 'sticky'; 'snēhitham' is mind and mind sticking together. Here *Ambāl*'s hair is well combed, not tangly. 'Snigdha' can also mean soft or smooth. Then we have the word '*slakshṇam*': it too means glossy, without any knots. The *Āchāryā* describes *Ambāl*'s hair with a chain of adjectives: it is like a forest of dark lotuses; glossy and black; dark, smooth and velvety. In the previous stanza the solid gold crown was described with difficult words, but here the words are silken like 'thulitha-dalitha-indhīvara-vanam'. The *Āchāryā*, a great proponent of Adhvaitha, is a poet's poet.

Ambāl's hair possesses the coolness and colour of indhīvara flowers But is that its only quality? The third line of the stanza mentions another remarkable characteristic of the hair: 'sahaja saurabhyam', natural fragrance. Even without flowers in it *Ambāl*'s hair is redolent of divine' fragrance. The *Āchāryā* asserts firmly that *Ambāl*'s hair is naturally fragrant: it has 'sahaja saurabhyam'.

In the (*Vēdhic*) Thrayambaka manthra, *Śīva* himself has the name of 'Sugandhi'. In the Rock Fort temple at Thiruchi which has considerable association with the *Saundaryalaharī* the goddess is *Sugandhi-Sugandhakunthalāmbikā*. 'unthala' also means tresses of hair.

Even today in certain places where *pūjā* to *Ambāl* is properly conducted and *Ambāl*'s appearance is recognised, we hear it being said, 'There is the scent of screwpine flowers in the air.'

Ambāl wears in her naturally fragrant hair flowers from Indra's celestial garden (Nandavana). In the earlier stanza there was a reference to the Indradhanus (rainbow) on *Ambāl*'s crown. Here we see that her hair has flowers from Indra's garden.

'Valamathana': one who slew the demon Vala. 'Valama thanavātī' = Indra's garden. 'Vātī vitapinām' = those belonging to the trees of that forest. 'Vitapa' is a tree. We must add 'sumanasah' from the third line. Generally 'sumanas' is understood as one with a good manas or mind. The word is applied particularly to the celestial race. But 'sumanas' also means a flower because just as a man with his noble mind ablossom spreads his love without expecting any reward, a flower unfolds itself and spreads its fragrance among people whether they are good or bad. '*Valamathana-vātīvitapinām sumanasah*': we have to understand the meaning thus, 'flowers from the garden of *Dēvēndra*'s Nandavana, flowers like Mandhara and Pārijāta.'

When *Ambāl*'s hair is naturally fragrant why should she wear these flowers? If not for their fragrance, is she wearing them because they are beautiful to look at? I am told some people, even though they have no eye defect, wear spectacles to enhance their appearance. Does *Ambāl* wear flowers for a similar reason? No, not at all. She wears flowers not because she wants to wear them. The fact is it is the flowers themselves that are desirous of being worn by her. That is why they have themselves settled in her hair.

What is their desire?

'Yadhīyam saurabhyam sahajam upalabdhum' : 'Yadhīyam' = of the hair; 'saurabhyam sahajam' = natural fragrance; 'upalabdhum' = to obtain. It is their desire to obtain for themselves the natural fragrance of *Ambāl*'s hair. 'Labdhum' means to obtain, to acquire. Instead of experiencing the fragrance from a distance, the flowers yearn to enjoy the fragrance of *Ambāl*'s hair by being very close to it, indeed by being in her hair itself. This meaning is suggested by 'upalabdhum'. 'Vasanthyasmin' must be split as 'vasanti asmin'. The flowers of Dēvēndra's garden 'have acquired tenancy' of *Ambāl*'s hair to obtain its natural fragrance. 'Asmin' = in it (that is 'in the mass of hair'); 'vasanthi' = dwell; 'manyē' = so do I think.

The celestial flowers which far excel the flowers of the earth like the jasmine and *manōranjitam* dwell in *Ambāl*'s hair to obtain its natural fragrance. The *Āchāryā* prays that *Ambāl*'s tresses of hair, themselves dark, should dispel the darkness of our minds. The flowers (*sumanasah*) become more alluring by being in her hair; so they are a support for all those noble-minded people (*sumanasah*) who are engaged in meditation. A verse from the *Krishṇa Karmāmrutha* says that, though dark himself, *Krishṇa* is a lamp to remove our darkness of ignorance 'Nīlōpi nirantharah *thamah pradhīpah*'. Similar is the case with the dark hair of *Ambāl*.

Do not keep asking about how dark hair can dispel the darkness of our minds. You will get an answer to your question if you meditate on *Sugandhakunthalāmbikā*'s tresses of hair as the *Āchāryā* has described them. And how has he described them? As a forest of *indhivara* flowers; as cool, densely grown, soft, glossy, silken; as beautified by celestial flowers which themselves are beautified by them (*Ambāl*'s tresses of hair).

In the *kēśadhipādha* portrayal *kēśa* or hair comes first. Although the crown has been described first, it is worn above the hair and is not a part of the body but an ornament for it. If you see the back of the idols of goddesses, the hair above the nape of the neck is tied into a *round* shape and adorned. It is this that the *Āchāryā* has described.

In many of our temples of *Ambāl*, the goddess is named after her hair: *Kunthala -Nāyaki*, *Bhramara-Kunthalāmbā*, *Nīla-Kunthalāmbā*, *Pushpa Kunthalāmbā*, *Anjana-Kunthalāmbā*, *Sugandha-Kunthalāmbikā*. In the *Sahasranāmam* there are names of *Ambāl* descriptive of her hair. The first is '*Champakāsōka-punnāga-saugandhikalasathkachā*;' then there is '*Nīla-chikurā*'. The first name means *Ambāl* with her hair adorned by campaka, asoka, punnaga and saugandhika flowers. '*Nīla-chikurā*' means one with blue or black hair. In the *Thrisathī* we have the name '*Ēlasugandhichikurā*'. We must meditate on the '*kēsābhāra*' of *Ambāl* so as to dispel our '*klesābhāra*'. [We must meditate on the locks of hair of *Ambāl* so as to remove the burden of our hardships.]

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'SAUNDARYALAHARĪ'

The next stanza (44) is extremely beautiful and of special significance. The title of the hymn, '*Saundaryalaharī*', figures in it; it also deals with *Ambāl*'s hair. In the stanza that we just

considered (43), the *Āchāryā* says with reference to *Ambāl*'s hair, 'May it dispel darkness (*dhunōthu Dhvāntham*)', while here (in Stanza 44) he refers to *Ambāl*'s hair itself as darkness, '*kabarībhāra-timira*'. What is '*chikura-nikurumbam*' in the earlier stanza is '*kabarībhāram*' in the present one. The *Āchāryā* calls darkness '*Dhvāntham*' in the earlier stanza and '*timiram*' here.

Thanōthu kshēmam nasthanava-Vadhanasaundaryalaharī
Parivāhasrōtah-saraṇiriva sīmanthasaraṇih
Vahanthī sindūram prabalakabarī-bhāra-thimira
Dhivishām brundair-bandhīkruthamiva navīnārka-kiraṇam

'Thanōtu kshēmam nah'; 'nah kshēmam thanōthu' in prose order. The *Āchāryā* begins the stanza auspiciously by saying, 'May it bring wellbeing to all of us.'

What is to bring us well-being?

'*Sīmantha-saraṇī*': the way created by the parting line of the hair.

'*Sīmāntham*' means the parting line of the hair. 'Saraṇī' denotes a path, a line, a wave. Here it means a line.

'May the parting line of the hair of *Ambāl* bring us all well-being.'

We perform a *samskāra* called '*sīmāntham*' during the pregnancy of a woman. It is intended for the well-being of the child she is carrying. Strictly speaking, the rite is '*sīmantōnnayana*' = '*sīmantha+unnayana*'. 'Unnayana' means 'drawing upward'. '*sīmāntham*' means parting of the hair. Drawing upward (from the forehead) along the parting of the hair with a porcupine quill is beneficial to the foetus. This rite is '*sīmanthōnnayana*'.

The ceremony of wearing bangles and *sīmāntham* are performed during the pregnancy of a woman. The wearing of bangles is not for beauty alone. For women the bangles are a

protection. We wear on our wrists black or red strings called 'raksha' (protection). There is a ceremony called *kankāṇa-dhāraṇam* during marriage and other functions. It is meant not only to protect us from external harm; it imparts us strength of will and gives us protection in the task [or ceremony] we are about to undertake. The wearing of a bangle or a bracelet is said to proclaim one's determination to carry out some task. Apart from the wearing of a string, the wearing of bangles too is a protection for women.

Why is 'sīmāntham' known as the parting line of the hair? 'Sīmā' is border, boundary. We [people in Tamil Nadu] speak of 'Telungu sīmai' and 'Malayalam sīmai'. It means that the areas referred to are enclosed by four boundaries. We used to refer to England, the land of the people who ruled us, the land far away from our own, as *Sīmai*.

'Antam' is end. 'Sīma' + 'antham' is 'sīmāntham'. The end of the boundary is 'sīmāntham'. Strictly speaking 'sīmā+antam' must be 'sīmāntham'. The seer who was the friend of all the world must be called 'Viśwamitra', but as we know we pronounce the nama as 'Viśwāmitra'. In the latter word the a that should be short is used as long and in the former the 'a' that should be long is used short. There are exceptions like these [to the rules of samāsa and sandhij].

The end of which or what border is *sīmāntham* [with reference to the *samskāra*]? The 'end' of a woman's person or form. It was during the 20th century that it came to denote the end of the male person or form! So long as men had their *sikhā*, how could there have been a parting of the hair for them? Perhaps when they were children their hair must have been parted and also braided. There are two 'borders' for the human body, the head and the feet. On the first border, that is the head, the parting line of

the hair ends with the Brahmarandhra in the crown of the head. That is why it is called *sīmantha*.

Mahālakshmī resides permanently in five places. In the case of her idol we have to invoke her presence, make her reside in it and *instal* it to the accompaniment of the *prāṇa-prathista* mantra [the ceremony in which life is infused into the idol]. But in the five places I was speaking about she resides naturally without any ceremonial. These are the lotus, the forehead of the elephant, the hindpart of the cow, the back of the bilva leaf and the parting of the hair of sumangalis. We apply turmeric and kumkuma to the face of the cow; it is to make her more beautiful; but when it comes to *pūjā* we perform it to her hindpart. We must touch our eyes with the same hand with which we have touched the hindpart of the cow in reverence. When we perform *pūjā* to *Lakshmī* the rib of the bilva leaf must touch the idol; the rib is seen on the back of the leaf and it is there that the goddess is present. The fruit of the bilva tree is called 'Śrīphala'. Thulasi, that is so dear to *Mahāvishṇu*, is not included among the abodes of *Lakshmī*. In fact there are accounts in the Puranas of *Lakshmī* picking up a quarrel with Tulasi because of her (Thulasi) being another wife of *Mahāvishṇu*. The bilva that is so dear to *Siva* is mentioned in the (Vedhic hymn of) 'Śrīsūktha' as being associated with *Lakshmī*. One mantra in it says that the bilva fruit is a product of *Lakshmī*'s austerities and that it is capable of removing the '*alakshmī*' that is in you and outside of you. Such is the special quality of the fruit. As for the bilva leaf *Lakshmī* resides permanently on its back, on the rib. Like the *rēkha* [here meaning rib] of the bilva leaf is the parting line of the hair of sumangalis.

The *Āchāryā* gives greater importance to the parting of the hair of *Ambālī* than to any other part of her body because it is in that that *Lakshmī* resides, *Lakshmī* the Mother and the personification of all good fortune. This importance is reflected in

the fact that the *Āchāryā* also associates the parting of the hair with the title of the hymn itself, *Saundaryalaharī*. Whether it was the *Āchāryā* himself who gave his hymn that title or someone who came after him, the reason for choosing it – a term that occurs in the stanza itself – is that it is beautiful and wholly appropriate to the work.

‘*Saundaryalaharī*’ means a wave of beauty, a flood of beauty. I said that when the formless *Parāśakti* took the form that bestows grace it created waves of beauty. That form is ‘*Saundaryalaharī*’. *Ambālī*’s divinely auspicious figure is the flood of beauty arising from her grace, says the *āchāryā*. He uses the term referring to its association with her parting line of hair, *sīmantha*.

Does it mean that, according to him, the wave of beauty of *Ambālī* is created by that *sīmantha*? No. He remarks that it is from her divine face that the wave of beauty originates: ‘Thava Vadhana-saundaryalaharī.’ This is appropriate. Although *Ambālī*’s entire body is a flood of beauty, is not her head, as that of any individual, the most important part? And it is the head which gives a person his identity. If someone wants to look at us he has to do so with his eyes, speak to us with his mouth, and listen to us with his ears; and if we give him food he has to eat it with his mouth. All such activities are controlled by the brain which is also part of the head. Even beauty is known from a person’s eyes, nose, teeth and the disposition of his or her face. Emotions too are gauged from the face. If a man is beautiful it means his face is beautiful. The beauty of hands and legs comes later. *Ambālī*’s sidelong glance, gentle smile and nectarine speech: all these belong to her face. That is why the *Āchāryā* says that from her face spring waves of her beauty.

This flow of beauty is the motherly form assumed by the *Paramāthmā* to give us the highest blessing, and well-being; indeed its very purpose is to bestow grace on us.

'Thanōthu kshēmam nah thava Vadhana-saundaryalaharī.'

'Mother, the flood of beauty flowing from your beautiful face is not mere beauty. It is grace [a flood of grace], and may it bring us well being.'

What is the special connection of '*sīmantha*' with all this? Let us consider.

'Vahanthi sindūram.'

The *Āchāryā* says that the *sīmantha* carries sindura. Mention of sindura will remind some of the red-coloured powder used in the Siddha system of medicine. From its red colour the medicine is called *chendūram* (in Tamil). People speak of '*Sindūra Vināyaka*', Ganapathi who is all red. In the North, and in some rare cases in the South also, Gaṇapathi is seen smeared with sindūra. Like the god who is worshipped first, *Ānjanēya* who is adored last is also covered with sindūra. But not other deities. Sindūra is specially applied to the *Ādhi* deity and the *Antha* deity alone [to the first and the last, *Vināyaka* and Hanuman].

In the old texts, kumkuma is referred to as sindūra. When Mother *Vēdhā* prostrates herself before *Ambāl*, keeping her head at the feet of the goddess, the kumkuma in the parting of her hair sticks to *Ambāl*'s feet and becomes her *pādadhūli* (dust on her feet), so it is mentioned in the *Sahasranāmam*. The kumkuma in the parting of the hair is called here '*sīmantha-sindūri*'. It is learnt from the *Sahasranāmam* that the kumkuma is applied to the parting of the hair and that what *Ambāl* wears on the forehead, between the eyebrows, is the bindu (dot) with musk :the name, '*Mukhachandra-kaṭankābha-mrugaṇābhi-viśeshakā*', occurs in the *Sahasranāmam*. Like the blemish on the moon is the musk dot on *Ambāl*' face. Since this name comes between the one that describes the forehead and the one that describes the eyebrows, it is clear that the reference is to the spot between the eyebrows.

Kumkuma in the parting of the hair '*sīmantha-sindūri*' - here too the *Āchāryā* refers to the kumkuma in the parting of the hair as *sindūra*.

According to the *Śāsthras* the place where women must apply *sindūra*, praying for the long life of their husbands and for all good fortune, is the parting of the hair. The kumkuma worn in the middle of the forehead is an adornment. The space between the eyebrows is connected with one-pointedness of the mind as one meditates on the *Paramāthmā*; that is why sandal-paste and ashes are worn there. Even so, it is not specially important for *sumangalis*. In the old days they first applied kumkuma to the parting of the hair and then only to the forehead.

To invoke the presence of *Mahālakshmī*, who is also called *Bhāgyalakshmī* (the goddess of fortune), kumkuma must be applied to her abode which is on the line of parting of the hair. There are women who smear it liberally on the entire line of parting. If not in this manner kumkuma must be applied just above the forehead where the parting of the hair starts.

Ambikā has kumkuma all through the parting line of her hair: '*vahanthi sindūram sīmanthasarāṇī*', 'the way of the parting of the hair in which kumkuma is worn.' It is only when the kumkuma is applied to the entire line of the parting that there will be a '*kumkuma sarāṇī*', a path of kumkuma. If it is applied only to the starting point of the parting it will be a big dot and no more. From what the *Āchāryā* says subsequently (his description is the soul of his poetic imagination and the aesthetic pleasure afforded by the stanza) *Ambikā* has applied a big dot where the parting begins and extended it upwards in a thin streak all the way of the parting.

There is nothing signifying greater good fortune or joy than meditating on *Ambālī*'s parting of hair. The divine presence of

Ambāl is all auspiciousness and the parting of her hair in which *Mahālakshmī* resides is adorned by *kumkuma*.

Wherever *Ambāl* is present there *Lakshmī* is seen as her companion and attendant. The Supreme Goddess is flanked by *Lakshmī* and *Sarasvathī* who fan her with fly-whisks, so says the *Sahasranāmam*: 'Sa-chamararamā-vānī-savya-dakshinā-sēvithā.' Instead of having them as companions, *Ambāl* has them as her two eyes; they say this is the divine form of *Kāmākshī*. 'Ka' stands for *Sarasvathī*, 'Ma' for *Lakshmī*; and 'aksa' is eye: so the three syllables together ('*Kāmākshī*') mean one who has Ka and Ma for her eyes.

The *Āchāryā* says in a later stanza (64) that *Ambāl* lifts up *Sarasvathī* and places her on the tip of her own tongue. I had told you that speech is of special importance to *Ambāl*. When we speak of very learned men we say that *Sarasvathī* dances on the tip of their tongues. Similarly,, the *Āchāryā* says that *Sarasvathī* resides on the tip of *Ambāl*'s tongue. After much atheistic talk, the tongue of the speaker, it is said, becomes calloused. Here it is the opposite. Constantly speaking about *Īśvara*'s sport and extolling his various qualities -- in the manner of performing japa - *Ambāl*'s tongue becomes red like a hibiscus flower. Hibiscus is called 'japa' in Sanskrit. By telling the story of *Īśvara* in the manner of doing japa, *Ambāl*'s tongue becomes red like 'japa'.

The *Āchāryā* thus indulges in verbal play. When *Ambāl*'s tongue becomes red thus, *Sarasvathī* dwelling on its tip also becomes red like an image made of gems, says the *Āchāryā*. In keeping with the fact that *Ambāl* is mentioned in many places as having made the white-complexioned *Siva* red, she makes his sister (*Sarasvathī*) also a revolutionary! We saw earlier of how poets worship *Ambāl* as a red-coloured *Sarasvathī* and compose poetry that is a wave of the erotic *rasa*. Here the white *Sarasvathī* is conceived of as the red *Sarasvathī*.

Of the two who serve *Ambāl* by fanning her with the fly-whisk, one (*Sarasvathī*) is elevated by her by being placed on the tip of her tongue while the other (*Mahālakshmī*) is given a higher place by being placed in the parting of her hair where she decorates *Ambāl* with sindura.

The *sīmantha* of any sumangali is the abode of *Bhāgyalakshmī*; how much more exalted must be the *sīmantha* of *Ambāl* who is the source of all good fortune? We must meditate on it as the pinnacle of all good fortune and beauty. At the very beginning of *Abhirāmī-Anthādhi*, *Abhirāmibhatta* calls the *sīmantha-sindūra* '*uchchi-thilakam*'. Mark the term *uchchi-thilakam* [the tilaka on the crown of the head]; it is not the tilaka on the forehead. Sumangalis, apart from applying kumkuma to the forehead, must wear the same on the *uchchi*, the parting of the hair.

The hair of *Ambāl*, which is like the forest of *indhīvaras* described in the previous stanza, is divided by the parting in the middle. The parting is naturally white. But *Ambāl*, who makes the white-complexioned *Śiva* and *Sarasvathī* red, makes the parting of her hair also the same colour. Her tresses of hair are like waves of glossy black and the parting shines amidst them as a bright red line.

Many of us are unable to appreciate beauty like this. We turn away from objects of beauty, reject them as useless, since we are interested only in things of utility. But some do have an aesthetic sense. As for the poets, when they see an object of beauty, they do not stop with it, they seek or think of other objects of beauty, create their own images of beauty.

What simile does suggest itself to the *Āchāryā* after seeing [with his mind's eye] the glossy black hair of *Ambāl* which is like the waves of the blue-black sea and its line of parting which is like red colour flowing through it?

....*prabala-kabarī-bhāra-thimira*

Dvishām brundair-bandhīkruthamiva navīnārka-kiraṇām

‘Navīnārka kiraṇām’: ‘arka’ = the sun; ‘arka-kiraṇām’ = ray of the sun. ‘Navīna arka’ = the new sun - i.e. the rising sun. ‘Navīnārkakiraṇām’ = ray of the rising sun.

What does the rising sun look like? He is vermilion in colour, which is also the colour of *Rajarājesvari*. The *Sahasranāmam* says the same thing, ‘*Udhyadh-bhānu*’.

The *Āchāryā* sees the parting of the hair of *Ambālī*, smeared with *sindūra*, as a ray of the rising sun. The big dot she has applied to the spot where the parting of the hair starts is like the rising sun. The line of *kumkuma* starting from it is like a ray of the rising sun.

‘*Prabala - kabarībhāra - thimira - dvishām brundair bandhīkutham.*’ What is the meaning of this tongue-twisting line? Through the sound of the words, whether it is pleasing or harsh, the *Āchāryā* conveys his meaning. Here the words sound as if they are daring us to a fight. Who is going to fight with whom? The theme here is the parting of the hair of *Ambālī*. Who is coming to wrestle with it [the parting of *Ambālī*’s hair]?

‘*Kabarī-bhāra-thimiram*’: the darkness that is the black mass of *Ambālī*’s hair. ‘*Prabala*’ comes as its adjective. The literal meaning of *Prabha* is ‘specially forceful or strong’. The *Āchāryā* qualifies the darkness that is *Ambālī*’s black tresses of hair with this word, *Ambālī*’s black hair that is especially strong. And when one feels one is excessively strong one becomes belligerent. But with whom will the darkness of *Ambālī*’s hair pick up a quarrel, with whom will it fight? Darkness fights with what? With light. Darkness goes to battle with the rising sun which is its born enemy and which brings night to an end and creates daytime. Here, if darkness is *Ambālī*’s hair, the rising sun is the *kumkuma* in the parting of her hair. Had she applied it to some other part of her

body, like her hand or, leg, the hair would not be able to do anything about it. *Ambāl* has placed the rising sun on the crown of her head and thus given an opportunity to her hair to fight with it. And, indeed, the darkness of her hair has set out to fight with the rising sun with all gusto.

When light approaches, darkness has to flee. When you place a lamp in an area of darkness, the darkness takes to flight. Day after day the sun makes its appearance and day after day darkness disappears as the sun rises. When one obtains *jnāna*, *ajnāna* is dispelled without leaving any trace. We compare this to darkness being dispelled as the sun appears. How can darkness oppose the sun with courage? [The reference is to the darkness of *Ambāl*'s hair.] If it is contrary to what one expects (contrary to Nature), it is due to the encouragement given it by *Ambāl*, to the darkness of her hair. If a person feels that he has the liberty to do anything it means he has been given 'room' to do whatever he likes. *Ambāl* has given darkness (her hair) a place (that is room) on her head itself. She dotes on it by oiling it every day so as to enhance its glossiness and by wearing in it celestial flowers. It is because of her support and encouragement that it has become excessively strong.

[A story is told of Garuda and *Ādhishesha*.] 'Garuda, are you well?' asks *Ādhishesha*. 'If one is in one's own place one will be well,' is the answer, and it has become a well-known saying. The case of *Ambāl*'s hair is similar.

Perumāḷ (*Vishṇu*) is seen in two aspects: reclining (on *Ādhishesha*) in the ocean of milk and holding *durbar* in Vaikunta. It is during the time he reclines on *Ādhishesha*, in the ocean of milk, that he is adored by Anantha, Garuda, Vishvaksena and all other attendants of his. Anantha is the same as *Ādhishesha*. It is on him that *Vishṇu* reclines: it is *Vishṇu*'s *Ananthaśayana* as well as *Ānandaśayana*.

Ādhisēsha is afraid of going to Vaikunta where *Vishṇu* holds court. There all the importance is for Garuda. In the ocean of milk it is *Ādhisēsha* who supports *Vishṇu* and as he does so he has to remain in one place. But once *Vishṇu* laves his couch of *Ādhisēsha* it is Garuda who assumes importance. In temple after temple (in Tamil Nadu) there is a sanctum to him and he is called '*Periya Thiruvadi*' facing *Vishṇu*. Unlike *Ādhisēsha* who has to remain in one place supporting *Vishṇu*, Garuda flies from place to place carrying *Vishṇu* on his back. If an elephant-king raises a cry of distress in some world or other it is Garuda who has to rush to the spot with *Vishṇu* on his back.

The snake and Garuda are born enemies. It is always Garuda who wins [if there is a fight between the two]. Garuda tears the snake to shreds and gobbles it up. The snake which is feared by everybody itself trembles at the mention of Garuda's name. The elephant has nightmares of the lion and the rat of the cat.

Ādhisēsha who is the support of the whole world trembles before 'Garudāzhvār (*Āzhwārs* are *vaishṇava* saints. Garudha is given the status of *Āzhwār*) who is the vehicle of *Vishṇu*. So he is afraid of going to Vaikuntha where *Vishṇu* holds court.

Ādhisēsha who trembles before Garuda saw the latter when he came to worship *Vishṇu* who was reclining on the great serpent in the ocean of milk. *Ādhisēsha* was proud of his importance in the ocean of milk; especially because *Vishṇu* reclined on him. *Vishṇu* in fact lay like a huge green mountain stretching his body from head to foot on him and this gave *Ādhisēsha* some courage and confidence due to the feeling that he was protected by the god.

Ordinarily, when we see people who are superior to us in position and strength, we must prostrate ourselves before them without mentioning their names. If we meet a person of the same rank and status we must make inquiries about his health, well-

being, etc, and ask him, 'Are you well?' Even then we must not call him by his name. If the person we meet is younger, we may address him by his name and ask him, 'Are you well?'

Ādhisēsha who had always been fearful of Garuda as one superior to him was now emboldened to speak to him because *Vishṇu* was reclining on him. He thought that he was now occupying a position higher than that of Garuda and felt the urge to have a dig at him. So he called Garuda by his name and asked, 'Garuda! Are you all right?'

Garuda understood how *Ādhisēsha* had suddenly become bold. And his reply showed how clever he was. He said: 'Anyone will be well if he is where he ought to be.'

Ādhisēsha asked Garuda about his well-being. Fear is the biggest cause of unhappiness and Garuda has had no cause for fear at any time. It is *Ādhisēsha* who is half the time unhappy because of his fear. It is only when he is with *Vishṇu* that he is without any fear. When he asks Garuda about his well-being, the king of birds has a dig at him in his reply: 'if one is where one ought to be, one will be well.' So goes the story.

Even planets have their power only when they are in their own houses. So one must be where one ought to be.

Darkness is in trouble in some place or other in the world. What may be called its direct foe is light and it is unable to encounter it (light). When the rising sun appears, it has to flee unable to face its onslaught. The infant sun is a greater enemy of darkness than the 'bigger' midday sun. It does not know the 'bigger' sun at all. As soon as the infant sun appears it runs away from it. 'Although I was keeping the whole world within my grasp, as the little sun appears I have to run away,' so thinks darkness to itself, angry because of the humiliation it has to suffer (at the hands

of the sun). It takes a vow: 'One day I will get hold of this infant sun and will have it bound so that I may not feel threatened by it.'

Now *Ambāl* has gathered that darkness into her tresses of hair. Then she has combed that hair and placed the infant sun in it. Darkness, finding new courage, is now full of excitement and happiness.

Darkness surrounds the sun on *Ambāl*'s forehead (the sun in the form of the *sindūra tilaka*) and swallows the rays emanating from it. Contrary to the usual phenomenon of light swallowing darkness, here it is darkness that consumes light. Like the light of the sun forming a halo round it and pervading all space, should not the *sindūra tilaka* of *Ambāl*, that is like the rising sun, spread its light all over *Ambāl*'s head and make her hair a lustrous red? But only one ray of this sun is seen and it is in the form of the red-coloured parting line of *Ambāl*'s hair. All the remaining rays lie buried in the hair which shines in all its black glory. This means that the darkness of the hair has fought with the red lustre of the sun, triumphed over it, rendered it incapable of rising again. You must meditate on this hair of *Ambāl*. The parting of the hair of the great *sumangali* is a lustrous red smeared with *kumkuma*. Around it, and almost pressing against it, is the mass of hair that appears in waves of black. The blackness of the hair enhances the redness of the line of parting and this redness, in its turn, intensifies the blackness of the hair itself.

The darkness that is *Ambāl*'s mass of hair challenges the rising sun in the form of the *sindūra tilaka* on her forehead thus: 'Now see what you can do to me.' Then, surrounding it on all sides, it devours all its rays, leaving just one untouched.

Why does the darkness of *Ambāl*'s hair leave just one ray undevoured? If it has not done so there will be no evidence of its having fought with the sun. There are so many red objects that do

not have rays emitting light. So we would think this is just another example of the same kind [the ray not devoured by darkness]. If there is just one ray of the sun left we would look at it in amazement and recognise that all the other rays have been 'conquered' by the darkness.

'Dvisham brundaih' means 'by the enemy forces in their hordes.' 'Dvishām' is derived from 'dvish'; 'brundam' is a collection. The darkness that we see, as wave after wave of *Ambāl's* hair, resembles enemy forces arrayed before us. 'Bandikruthamiva': as if imprisoned by this invading army. The rising sun that is the *sīmantha sindūra* looks as if imprisoned.

Not to speak of the rays that were devoured, what about the ray that is left undevoured? Is this ray at least allowed to remain in freedom? No. It has been clapped in gaol and it cannot move this side or that. The parting of the hair must be in the middle, not on any side. We cannot change its place as we like. From the word 'bandikrutham' we infer that the line of parting of the hair is not free to move this side or that. If the divine presence is needed, the parting should not be on this or that side and must be right in the middle. The kumkuma must be made of pure turmeric, not of *maida* or of artificial colours - it is all evil.

The word 'bandham' means among other things 'to arrest'. 'Bandh' means 'prisoner'. 'Bandhīkrutham iva' means 'as if arrested.'

If *Ambāl's* sindura *sīmantha* is seen in the middle of the mass of her hair, it looks as if arrested by the hordes of the enemy forces of darkness.

'What is the connection between the lazy sun that is the parting of *Ambāl's* hair, the sun that suffered at the hands of darkness, and the wave of beauty of the Supreme Goddess that creates well-being of the highest order?'

In the previous stanza we saw that, with the blackness that is thamas, *Ambāl* dispels the darkness of nescience. Here she exalts the simantha, the parting line of her hair, that has suffered defeat in a sense [at the hands of the very darkness], and with that itself creates well-being. The *sīmantha*, the abode of *Lakshmī*, is in fact the resting place of all well-being. Its defeat is only a matter of imagination. '*Bandhīkruthamiva*', 'as if imprisoned': it is not that it is really or permanently imprisoned.

Now let us see the exalted position of the parting line of *Ambāl*'s hair: it is the very soul of the stanza. The *Āchāryā* in fact mentions it first and then only does he speak of its failure. It was I who changed the order thinking that the stanza should not conclude on a note of failure [that is the failure suffered by the simantha at the hands of the darkness of the hair]. The first two lines of the stanza:

Thanōthu kshēmam nasthava-Vadhana-saundaryalaharī
parīvāhasrōthah-saraniriva sīmanthasaranīh

Ordinarily great poets use words sparingly and merely suggest the meaning they want to convey. Also they do not use a number of words in a stanza meaning the same, i.e. synonyms. If at all they use more than one word with the same meaning, it is to underline the importance of the subject they are dealing with.

Here four words, '*laharī*', '*parīvāham*', '*srōthas*' and '*saranī*', are used. They have more or less the same meaning. It is to convey the idea forcefully, how great the flow of *Ambāl*'s beauty is, that these four words with almost the same meaning are used in the same context.

There is a point in my saying 'more or less the same meaning'. Actually the four words do not all mean precisely the same thing. A great poet would be reluctant to use words that have an identical sense. Though ordinary people may not differentiate

between the words, the learned would note the minute differences in their meaning [the nuances] and use them in such a manner as to heighten the literary flavour of the poem concerned.

It is thus that the four words differ in their meanings. 'Laharī' is a wave on the surface of water; 'parīvāham' is the same as 'pravāham' and is a stream that has its course over a large area. 'Srōthas' need not be a turbulent flow but a canal. 'Saraṇī', as mentioned in the term 'sīmantha-saraṇī', is a straight flow. No river flows in a straight line; so 'saraṇī' is like a man-made chanal. 'Laharī' is that which rises and falls in the same place, then 'parīvāham' or 'pravāham' that courses through a number of places over a large area; afterwards 'srōthas' which is a stream coursing through in a disciplined manner so to speak; and lastly 'saraṇī' which is a man-made canal meant to carry the water from the 'srōthas'.

Ambālī's beauty is like this. It rises as a wave from her face and then spreads as a 'parivāham'. When it touches the top of her forehead it becomes a river and when the mass of hair becomes embankments for the river it refuses to be contained by them. *Ambālī's* beauty has to be like this: it must go beyond all shores, all embankments. It is no matter of pride for it if embankments are built to contain it 'Vakthra-Lakshmīparīvāha...' : 'the flow of lustre of the face' is the term mentioned in the *Sahasranāmam*. *Ambālī's* beauty flows round her face like a river, as if contained by it; then it becomes placid along the forehead but becomes a quick flow without being contained by the shore of the hair. All of a sudden this flow of the loveliness of *Ambālī's* face breaks over the shores, and rising above, as if against all obstacles, becomes narrow and straight as the darkness [the darkness of her hair] presses against it from both sides. It now takes the course of a canal. This canal (saraṇī) is the line of parting of *Ambālī's* hair (sīmantha-saraṇī). Her sīmantha is a line representing her beauty

which is but an expression of her compassion. Above it, and beyond it, you do not see any part of the goddess's body. When we pray for the well-being of all, as a blessing of *Ambāl's* beauty, we give particular importance to the wave of beauty of her face, 'Vadhana-saundaryalaharī'. The *Āchāryā* gives here even greater importance to *Ambāl's* *sīmantha* which is a channel created by the loveliness of her face rising as a flow against all obstacles.

For the sake of *Krishṇa Paramāthmā*, a path was created across the Yamuna which was in flood. The flood of beauty of *Ambāl's* face has made a path for itself amid her tresses of black hair which are like a flood of darkness, like the Yamuna itself.

'Thanōthu kshēmam nah.' If we read this stanza with all our heart, meditating on *Ambāl*, her beauty will save us from being imprisoned by all those hordes of our enemies like desire. We will obtain spiritual uplift and will be blessed with the power to do good to all the world also.

* * *

THE TWO HALF-MOONS -THAT CHANGED PLACES

In the next stanza (45), although the description of *Ambāl's* hair continues, what is important in it is the delineation of her face. It is in connection with it that we have a reference to the hair falling over her forehead.

It is customary to compare the face to the lotus. The terms '*mukhakamalam*' and '*Vadhanāravindam*' [both meaning 'lotus face'] are frequently seen in books. What the *Āchāryā* does is not making a general comparison of *Ambāl's* face to the lotus. He deals with the various similarities between the World Mother's face and the lotus, 'item by item'.

The lotus unfolds its petals little by little and that is part of its beauty. *Ambāl's* gentle smile is similar. Her lips part slowly,

tenderly, revealing the enchantment of her smile and showing the teeth inside which are like the filaments of a lotus. Like the lotus again, *Ambāl*'s face has a sweet fragrance. The bee remains embedded in the lotus imbibing its nectar. A number of bees keep buzzing round it. The one who burnt Manmatha with his eye (Manmatha who had a bow made of bees), the eyes of the same one, *Paramēśvarā*, become black bees imbibing the nectar that is the sweetness of *Ambāl*'s face. The hair playfully falling over her forehead looks like a swarm of bees surrounding a lotus. In this fashion, the *Āchāryā* brings in many parallels between *Ambāl* and the lotus.

The face like the moon is as conventional a description as the face like the lotus. If something novel is attempted in a poem it means an extra element of literary *rasa* imparted to it. This is precisely what the *Āchāryā* does in the next stanza (46):

*Lalātam lāvaṇya-dhyuthi-vimalamābhāthi thava yadh
Dvithiyam thanmanyēmakutaghatitham Chandraśakalam
Viparyāsa-nyāsādh ubha yamapi Sambhūya cha mithah
Sudhālēpasyūthih pariṇamathi rākā-himakarah*

Likening the face of a human being or a deity [as mentioned before] to the lotus is a convention that many poets have followed. The *Āchāryā* has himself resorted to it often. *Mūka* refers to *Ambāl* thus: '*Rākāchandra-samāna-kānthi-Vadhanā*'. '*Rākā*' is the full moon. Even our present stanza concludes with a mention of the full moon, '*Rākā-himakarah*'. But it is not used as a simile for the entire face of *Ambāl*. Were it so there would be nothing remarkable about it.

What then does the *Āchāryā* say?

From the way I have explained the meaning of stanzas by rearranging the words, you must have yourselves understood that

‘*Makutaghatithamchandra-sakalam*’ means *Ambāl*’s crown encrusted with the crescent moon. ‘*Lalātam*’ is forehead and ‘*vimalam*’ means ‘without any blemish or impurity’. ‘*Dhyuthi*’ is lustre, light. ‘*Ābhāthi*’ means shines. ‘*Thava*’ means your(s). ‘*Yadh*’ - that which; ‘*tath*’ = that. (‘*Than-manyē*’ is ‘*thath-manyē*’). ‘*Manyē*’ - think - it has been used in an earlier stanza (43).

‘*Adhvaitham*’ or ‘*adhvithiyam*’ means that which has no second. It is the opposite of ‘*dhvithiyam*’; so it could be guessed that the word ‘*dhvithiyam*’ in the stanza means ‘the second’. Altogether what do the first two lines mean?

‘Your forehead that is unblemished and that shines with a beautiful lustre looks like a second image of the half-moon adorning your crown.’

Simply, ‘it means there is a half-moon on *Ambāl*’s head.

Ambāl and *Īsvara* carry the crescent moon of *Thrithiya* or the third day (of the bright fortnight), not the *Ashtamī Chandra* (moon of the eighth day). The half-moon is of *Ashtami*. But if you look closely at the crescent moon of the third day depicted on idols and in paintings, you will note that the two ends of the crescent have dots which, if connected, would form the diameter of the full moon. If it is the *Ashtami* moon (half-moon) you will see the line joining these points. On the third day following the new moon they will not be seen. You will see what looks like a slice of pumpkin, the rest of the half-moon being scooped out. If you see the crescent moon of the third day in the sky you will see the outline up to the points of the diameter. If you look at it more closely you will even see the outline of the full moon faintly. It is the half-moon that is on *Ambāl*’s head.

The semicircular forehead of *Ambāl* looks like a half-moon. The *Sahasranāmam* also refers to it by the name, ‘*Ashtamī-Chandra-vibhrājadhalikasthala-sōbhithā*’.

Ambāl has one half-moon on the crown, the second half-moon being her forehead itself.

It is now that we come to the intriguing part of the stanza.

Viparyāsā-nyāsādh ubhayamapi sambhūyā cha mithah
Sudhālēpasyūthih pariñamathirākā-himakarah

‘Ubhayamapi’ = both (the two), half moon of the crown and the half moon that is the forehead. ‘Ubhayah’- two (both). *Perumāḷ* or *Vishṇu* being with *Śrīdēvi* and *Bhūdēvi* is referred to by Bhatthas as being with ‘Ubhaya-nāchchiyārgaḷ’ [‘nāchchiyār’, Tamil word, means a queen, here consort of *Vishṇu*]. The upper half of the moon and the lower half of the moon, ‘mithah’= mutually, one with the other -

‘*Viparyāsa-nyāsādh*’: the phrase should not be split thus, ‘*Viparya-sanyāsādh*’, to mean that the reference is to a sannyaasin. ‘*Viparyāsa*’ means reverse order, making something upside down. ‘*Nyāsam*’ has the sense here of joining.

How do you find the two half-moons, the upper and the lower ones? What is on the crown is the lower half of the full moon and below that is *Ambāl*’s forehead shaped like the upper half of the full moon. In other words the upper half of the full moon is the lower one here and the lower half is the upper one here. If the two are joined together in the reverse order? ‘*Sambhuya cha*’: if they are glued together?

‘How can the two be stuck together with paste? We may keep the one upon the other but how can they be securely pasted together Where do you find the gum good enough for this?’

Yes, there is such a gum. You need not go far looking for it. The moon itself has it. Does not the moon have *amrutha*, ambrosia? It also serves as a paste. ‘*Sudhā-lēpa-syūthih*’: ‘*sudhā*’ is nectar; ‘*lēpa*’ is paste or gum; ‘*syūthih*’ is sewing. If you stick

the two parts together with paste there is the risk of their being separated. This gum called amrutha is not an ordinary paste or gum. It keeps the two parts sewn together secure and there will be no risk of their becoming separated.

Thus if you take the half-moon on *Ambāl*'s head and the half-moon, that is her forehead and, reversing the two, sew [join] them together with the nectar exuding from the moon itself - '*rākā himakarah pariṇamathi*' - you will get the full moon.

Instead of speaking of *Ambāl*'s whole face as the full moon, the *Āchāryā* speaks of her forehead as a half moon and, taking the half moon on the head, he asks us to keep the two reversed and fasten the together with amrutha [which is exuded by the moon itself]. Thus out of his strange imagination is created the full moon. He concludes the stanza with the words '*rākā himakarah*':

In the end, when referring to the full moon, he describes it 'himakarah', remembering how it rains coolness. Earlier he had spoken of it as exuding '*sudhā*' or nectar. With *pūṛṇimā*, that is '*rākā*', the *Āchāryā* has associated coolness. The full moon of the month of *Mārgaśirsha* which rains coolness has a special significance. 'Thiruvādhirai' [Thiru+Ārdhra or Sri Ārdhra] is celebrated on this day. When the cold of the winter combined with the coolness of the full moon, Nataraja who embodies the universe is bathed the whole night in sandal-paste. 'Adhirai' is from 'Ārdhra' and it means wet. There is a verse which says that near Nataraja who is wet because of his *abhisheka* of various kinds, is *Ambāl*, the daughter of the mountain of snow, and herself wet in her compassion. 'Vame bhage dayā'rdra Himagiri-dubithā.' In the very first stanza (42) of the '*Saundaryalaharī*' section of the hymn the *Āchāryā* calls *Ambāl* 'Himagirisutha' and he refers here to the full moon as 'himakara'. It occurs to me that he must have been reminded of the *abhisheka* performed to Nataraja on the day of Ārdhra'

THE EYEBROWS AS BOW-THE EYES AS BOWSTRING

The next stanza (47) is more knotty than this (46). I wonder whether I shall be able to make you understand all the poetic device adopted in it. The effort to explain it all I regard as *pūjā* offered to *Ambāl*; and to try to grasp the meaning of the stanza is to make us think of her and to keep us going around her again and again. Were the stanza part of an ordinary hymn it could be explained easily. It is not possible to fix our minds on *Ambāl*, without taking some trouble. Poetic beauty consists in imagery that is ingeniously and intelligently expressed, in resorting to certain literary devices to convey ideas: these will keep us brooding for long so as to discover the meaning of the passage in question. The *Āchāryā* has blessed us with a few such difficult stanzas on *Ambāl*. Much time will be needed to grasp their meaning. The time spent in understanding them will be time spent in thinking of *Ambāl*. That must be the reason why the *Āchāryā* composed such verses. As we keep unravelling the tangled skein these verses are we will keep meditating on *Ambāl*. At the same time removing the tangles in the stanzas will be of help to us in becoming freed from the complexities, difficulties, of life itself.

Now for the *śloka*:

Bhruvaubhugñē kinchidhbhuvana-bhaya-bhanga-vyasanini
Thvadhīyē nethrābhyām madhukara-ruchibhyām dhruthaguñām
Dhanur manyē savyētharakara-gruhītham Rathipatheh
Prakōshṭē mushtau cha sthagayathi nigūdāntharam Umē

‘Bhruvau’ the two eyebrows. The Tamil ‘puruvam’ and the English ‘brow’ are both derived from the Sanskrit ‘bhru’. Its dual form is ‘bhruvau’. How do *Ambāl*’s brows look? ‘Kinchidh bhuvanah’, somewhat knitted.

Are they knitted in anger? No. When one is lost in thought the brows become knitted and it is the same case with *Ambāl*’s

brows. When the brows are creased in anger they are raised a bit and they will not look arched as they should naturally. Now *Ambāl*'s brows are more curved than they are even naturally. They are arched like this when she grants abhaya (freedom from fear) or when she is sad because her children are experiencing fear.

'I look at *Ambāl*. Her brows are knitted. I feel she is lost in thought. This is confirmed by the expression on her face. What does her face suggest? That she is vyasanini.'

'*Vyasana*' means sorrow, worry. Why does *Ambāl* feel sad or how is she vyasanini? After describing her as '*Ānandalahari*' and '*Chidānandalaharī*', what is the sense, *Swāmī*, in saying that she is sad and that her brows are creased because of that?

Yes. She is indeed *Ānandalaharī* within. However, is she not our Mother? Is she not the Mother of all the worlds? People are suffering agony, trapped as they are in the fear of worldly existence. *Ambāl* has shown them many ways in which they can free themselves from such existence. But they have ignored them and are suffering because of it. They are always gripped by one fear or another. *Ambāl* is sad - she is vyasanini because she is worried about banishing this fear from all the worlds: 'bhuvana-bhaya-bhanga-vyasanini.' 'Bhaya-bhanga' : *Ambāl* will break down, destroy, fear. 'Dhanurbhangam' means breaking the bow, is it not? *Ambāl* will break down our fear. She will now and then think of new ways of how we can conquer our fear or reveal to us [make known to us] *āchāryās* for the same purpose. This is the reason [her concern for us] why she has flickered her brows, brows that are arched like bows.

In an earlier stanza (24) we had this: '*Kṣharāchalithayōh bhrūlatikayōh*'. By momentarily flickering her brows *Ambāl* makes the Panchakruthya deities perform their functions. She is all-powerful and the embodiment of all bliss. The Supreme Being

that she is, when she is in the aspect of Mother, all are her children, including grass, worms, insects, humans, celestials. Just as an ordinary mother is worried about her children, she, the World Mother, is anxious about all her offspring. 'These children of mine should not know any hardship, any fear. But they are suffering, they are in fear', thus worried, the Compassionate One is lost in thought and knots her eyebrows in her sorrow --

From the brows of a person we can know his or her mind. The *Āchāryā* has composed the stanza based on his close observation of this phenomenon. 'My children must not know any fear; but they seem to be already in its grip, so' *Ambāl* thinks to herself, worrying. It is not explicitly stated in the stanza that she knits her brows in her worry. Does she perhaps exclaim angrily, 'Who is that? Who is trying to hurt my children?' The brows are creased when we speak in an intimidating voice. Even when we remove a person's worries and keep him in good cheer our brows curve in another fashion.

Ambāl has taken upon herself the duty of protecting people from fear. But does she remove their fear after they are gripped by it or does she prevent them from becoming subject to it? For a mother it seems particularly appropriate if, as a precaution, she sees to it that her children are kept away from fear. But then the idea of 'bhuvana-bhayabhanga' does not fit in here. No, no, there is nothing remarkable about fear being kept at bay from her children. In that case there will be no opportunity for us to keep thinking of *Ambāl* and of our hearts melting in remembrance of her compassion: we are not likely to develop love for her. When we are gripped by fear and she destroys it we will feel happy that we are freed from fear and in our joy rush to our Mother and clasp her.

I have spoken to you about these stanzas, their beauty of expression, the beauty of the meaning they convey. But what I have been able to convey to you about the beauty is not beauty at

all. There is far more in them that is really beautiful and I am unable to speak about it. Connoisseurs and devotees may be able to discover in these passages greater beauty than I have been able to discern [or speak about].

When one's eyebrows are wrinkled in sorrow we cannot keep appreciating them. But the *Āchāryā* is all appreciation for them [that is for *Ambālī*'s eyebrows that are wrinkled in sorrow].

Our attention is riveted by these eyebrows and we gaze at them forgetting ourselves. It means that they are not an ordinary growth of hair and that there is something great about them. The *Āchāryā* discovers this greatness and speaks about it in the next three lines. On the whole, this is in keeping with what is conveyed at the beginning of the third line.

'*Dhanur manyē.*' - 'I regard the two brows as a bow.'

The bow is a curved object. The eyebrow is also arched. All poets compare brows to the bow. However, you must not make the mistake of thinking that the *Āchāryā* is doing the same. As stated often, he sees everything from a new angle. Even when he apparently repeats the imagery already used by other poets he adds a new dimension, a new meaning, to it.

He does the same here. He does not see the eyebrows of *Ambālī* as two separate bows. Instead he sees the two together as one bow. A bow from one end to the other need not be a single arch. Are not there bows that consist of two arches? For the *Āchāryā* the two brows of *Ambālī* are the two halves of the same bow. The curves of the two brows are the two halves of the same bow. When a skilled archer strings his bow, the tension caused will create vibrations that spread like waves along the string. The wrinkles formed in the brows are similar. The two eyebrows together form a single bow - '*dhanur manyē.*'

But the two brows do not meet. That is just above the tip of the nose the two brows do not meet since there is no growth of hair there. According to the *Sāmudrikā-Śāsthra*, hair growing in that area is not one of the characteristics of women belonging to a noble class. There is a saying (in Tamil) : ‘Eyebrows joined will unjoin (ruin) the family.’ That *Ambāl* has no hair between her eyebrows shows that she is a lady of an exalted type. But this fact goes against the poetic concept (that *Ambāl*’s eyebrows make a single bow). When the two brows are together likened to a bow, what about the gap between them? Is it not absurd to imagine that a bow broken like this in the middle will stay in one piece?

The gap applies not only to the stick part of the bow. The bow also consists of the string joining its two tips. In the second line the *Āchāryā* says that *Ambāl*’s eyes which shine like bees make up the black string of the bow (consisting of her two brows). As for the string it too is broken at the bridge of her nose. That the string stays in one piece without being broken makes the entire idea of the stick of the bow and its string doubly absurd.

Here lies the *Āchāryā*’s poetic genius: in overcoming the hindrance that appears in the way that his imagination takes him. He invites trouble by imagining the eyebrows - which ought to be two separate bows - as a single one. But he overcomes it with a novel explanation for the bow being defective in that it has a gap between its two parts. He argues that it is not a defect at all.

He says that this bow belongs to Manmatha. ‘Rathipathēh’ - Rathi’s pathi (husband) is Manmatha - ‘*Rathipathēh dhanur manye*’: ‘I think it is the bow of Manmatha.’

‘What is your authority for thinking so?’ ‘Yes, I’ll show you the authority.’ ‘*Thvadhīye nethrābhyām madhukararuchibhyām dhruthaguṇām*.’ This is the authority.

‘Thvadhīye’ = your; ‘*madhukara-ruchibhyām*’ = (that) shine like bees; ‘*nethrābhyām*’ = with the two eyes; ‘*dhruthagunām*’ = (the bow) with the string; ‘*gunām*’ means here string. *Ambāl*’s left and right eyes (the forehead eye is not taken into account here) shine like black bees. The forehead eye is red in colour, so it cannot naturally be described as a black bee. The sharp look of the two eyes which are like black bees takes in all creatures of the world. The effect of their gaze is such that the two bees that are the eyes look like an entire row of bees. When a number of individual still photographs are shown (projected on the screen) at a certain speed you see them as a continuous sequence (the principle of motion pictures). Similarly, though there are only two black bees (the two eyes) their rotating movement, together with their sparkle, create the illusion of a row of bees which, again, resembles a string made up of bees. Above that is the bow (*Ambāl*’s brows) and appropriate to it the string made up of the row of bees (as suggested in the description given above). The string of bees is part of Manmatha’s bow. Remember what is mentioned in an earlier stanza (6), ‘*maurvī madhukaramayī*.’ That is why I regard it as the bow of Manmatha.’

‘All right. So far so good. This was the reason for your being rooted to the spot, forgetting yourself when you saw *Ambāl*’s brows. Is not Manmatha’s bow sugarcane? In the brows of the World Mother flows the sweet sugarcane juice of her compassion. That is why you are unable to take your eyes off that scene. Who is it that Manmatha is going to conquer by stringing his bow?’

‘Who else but *Paramēśvarā*? Any time he may become *Dakṣiṇāmūrthi* and remain all by himself in quietude. ‘That is why, to prevent him from doing so, Manmatha is ready with his bow stringed so that *Paramēśvarā* as Father will be with Mother (*Ambāl*) and keep blessing the world. It is *Ambāl* who, in her generosity, has given him such power and authority (as to make

Paramēśvarā a victim of his arrow). He, Manmatha, is just her tool. It is to demonstrate this truth that he shows *Ambāl'* brows and eyes as his instruments.'

'Is the tangled skein of the stanza unravelled? No. We have not come to it yet and to the poetic trickery played by the *Āchāryā*. I have not answered the question of how the bow, though broken, remains in one piece. Here is the complication and I am going to deal with it now. The *Āchāryā* too has it in the last line of the stanza: '*Prakōshtē mushtau cha sthagayathi nigūdhantharam Umē.*'

'*Savyētharakara-gruhītām*', these words in the third line must be taken together with the above. Therein lies the crux of the matter.

The stanza concludes with the word, '*Umē.*' That is, the *Āchāryā* is addressing the goddess. There is no snag in it, no complication. Let us see the rest.

'*Prakōshtē*' = with the wrist; '*mushtau cha*' = and with the fists: that is the mudra or gesture made by a wrestler, *mushti* or the clenched fist.

In the clenched fist the two joints of the fingers press against the palm. In Tamil *mushti* is '*mutti*'. There is a term '*mutti Pārppān*'. In the past there were Brahmins who were sworn not to beg for more than one fistful of rice from any household in an *agrahāra* [the Brahmin quarter in a village]. '*Mutti Pārppān*' refers to such a Brahmin. Nowadays the Brahmin keeps knocking at every door in search of money and comfort: that is the sort of *mutti Parppan* he is today. [*Mutti* here means knocking.]

'*Prakōshtē mushtau ca*' means the wrist and the fist. '*Sthagayathi nigūdhantharam*': '*nighūdha antharam*' means the inter-space that is not seen. '*Sthagayathi*', keeping something hidden.

The meaning of the fourth line together with these words :
'The middle part of the bow and of the string are not seen since they are hidden by Manmatha's wrist and fist.'

As an archer wields his bow he holds the middle portion of its stick with his fist. Then that part, which is held by the fist, will not be seen. Similarly since his wrist comes against the string the middle part of the string also will not be visible. At a glance the stick of the bow and its string will be seen with a gap in the middle of both, but surprisingly enough the two remain in position. Only on subsequent examination will you realise that the bow and the string are not broken and that the parts that seemed broken are hidden by the wrist and fist of the archer. 'The space between the eyebrows of *Ambāl* that has no hair in it and the space between the two eyes that are obstructed by the bridge of the nose seem such as to break the bow and the string. Actually they are not broken. It is the fist and the wrist of Manmatha who is holding the bow and the string that conceal those parts.' The *Āchāryā* gives such an ingenious explanation.

Which hand is concealing the middle part of the bow and how? The right or the left? This is answered in the earlier line: 'Savya-ithara-karagruhītam.' 'Savya' is right; 'savya-ithara-kara' means the hand that is other than the right one, that is the left hand. 'Gruhītam' means that which is held. The *Āchāryā* speaks of *Ambāl*'s brows forming the bow held by Manmatha's left hand.

'Savya' also means left. In Sanskrit there are a number of words that have opposite meanings. '*Chāyā*' means both shadow and light; '*sithi*' means both black and white; '*aghōram*' denotes what is fierce as well as what is not fierce. '*Nyāsam*' and '*sannyāsam*' mean being together, or 'leaving' or 'renouncing'. In the same way 'savya' yields the meaning of left as well as right. The *Sahasranāmam* mentions a name of *Ambāl* according to which *Lakshmī* and *Sarasvathī* who are to her left and right fan her with

fly-whisks: 'Sa-chāmara-Ramā-Vāñī-savyadakshīṇa-sēvithā.' 'Dakshīṇa' is right, so 'savya' has to mean left here. But, generally, 'savya' denotes right. The right hand is thought to be superior to the left. 'Apasavyam' means 'not right, inauspicious, indecent'. In English too right is right and left is wrong.

Here the *Āchāryā* too refers to right as 'savya.' In the next stanza he says *Ambāl*'s right eye is the sun and left eye the moon. Here too he uses the word 'savya' for right: 'savyam thava nayanam.'

'All right. Why all this explanation? Is it not enough to say that Manmatha holds the bow (the bow made up of her brows) with either of his hands, right or left?'

No, it is not enough. The middle part of the stick of the bow and the middle part of the string are hidden. We must clearly state which of the two hands the archer uses to hold the bow. The *Āchāryā* is famous for using words economically. He is like housewives who manage their households without any waste and make proper use of things. Then why does he say 'savya-ithara-kara-gruhitam' instead of merely saying 'kara-gruhitam'?

'Left' can be indicated with one word, 'vāmam'; instead of that the *Āchāryā* uses 'savyetharam' (other than the right). This he does deliberately. Usually archers hold their bow with their left hand and string the arrow with the right. More important than holding the bow is discharging the arrow. It is only with the right hand that we can do things facilely. Extremely skilled people have the ability to do things with their left hand also. Manmatha has such a skill. He holds the bow with his right hand, that is with his 'savya-kara', not 'savya-ithara-kara' as mentioned here, and strings the arrow, which is the more important task, with his left hand or 'savya-ithara-kara'. It shows that he is a great archer. Archers who hold their bows with their right hand are honoured with the name of 'Savyasāchins.'

Arjuna has this name, 'Savyasāchin.' In the *Gītā* the Lord tells him 'Nimitta matram bhava Savyasāchin.' The bow is just an instrument in the hands of Arjuna doing the bidding of the Lord. Indeed Arjuna himself is a tool in the hands of *Krishṇa* carrying out his will. 'As a great ambidextrous archer you draw the string of your bow. But you yourself are subject to me when I make you my bow and draw your string. I am the Savyasāchin of Savyasāchins,' the Lord condenses his concept in four words (in the *Gītā*).

Indra is the presiding deity of rain and the Thunderbolt, Vajrayudha is his adamant weapon. To prevent one from being hit by lightning verse containing ten names of Arjuna is recited. One of the ten names is 'Savyasāchin.'

Arjuna Phalguṇah Pārthah Kirītī Svēthavāhanah
Bhībhatshuh Vijayah Krishṇah Savyasāchī Dhananjayah

'Leave aside Arjuna and his story. Why bring them in? Manmatha is also a Savyasāchin like him. Even so the *Āchāryā* mentions pointedly that he holds the bow (that is made of the brows of *Ambāl*) with the hand other than savya. What is the point? Please speak about it.'

I will. When an archer holds the middle part of his bow with his hand, whether the middle part of the string is hidden or not will depend on how we are watching the scene, from which side of him. Now visualise the scene for yourself. When we suppose that Manmatha bends *Ambāl*'s brows, taking them together for a bow, on which side of him, are we positioned? On his left side. *Ambāl*'s face is on his right. It will be the back of the head. If *Ambāl*'s face is held upright, the bow of brows will be across it. So the one who holds it also will be crosswise in relation to her. On his right, *Ambāl*'s face will hide him like a wall. So we cannot see him from that side. We will have only the left side free from where we can watch the scene freely.

When seeing him like this, suppose he is holding the bow with his right hand, we will then see the four fingers of that hand bent in, gripping the middle of the bow. So, instead of the clenched fist, we will see only the palm covered by the fingers. Even now the middle part of the bow will be hidden, but if the bow is not held tightly there is the likelihood of the middle part of the bow being revealed a little bit through the fingers. When the fingers are kept tightly together and bent in, their second and third joints will not be as closely held together as the first. If the grip on the bow is loosened a bit its middle part will show itself.

The back of the clenched fist is different from the inner part where the fingers are folded in and held together with an effort. The back of the fist is one single part as God has made it. So it serves well as a shield covering the middle part of the bow.

If Manmatha is holding the bow (made up of *Ambāl*'s brows) with his right hand we, who are on his left, will not be able to see the back of the fist which conceals well the middle part of the bow.

More important is the question of the string. The *Āchāryā* mentions 'prakōṣtam' first, the archer's wrist hiding the middle of the string and only after this does he speaks of the fist ('mushtau cha') concealing the middle of the stick of the bow. The continuity of the string (the string is made up of *Ambāl*'s eyes) is broken by the bridge of the nose. This break will not be seen from our angle (when Manmatha is holding the bow with his right hand we are on his left). In our view, since his hand will be on the other side of the string, it will not be hidden by his wrist and the middle part of the string will be seen fully.

In this case the simile will go wrong. The middle of the string being concealed by the wrist of the archer cannot be compared to the fact of the space between *Ambāl*'s eyes (where their continuity seems to be broken) being hidden by the nose.

Imagine that Manmatha holds the bow with his left hand. 'Excellent! Excellent!' you would exclaim. Everything will be in order. The fist will hide the middle part of the bow without revealing a bit of it. The wrist holding the middle part of the string will hide it from our view.

I have, I believe, somewhat unravelled the tangle. Or is your head still in a whirl? So let us go to the next stanza (48).

The sum and substance of the stanza is this. The greatness of *Ambāl* is that she restored Manmatha to life, Manmatha who had been reduced to ashes by *Īsvara*. She did so because the sport of creation must go on. But people born in the process of creation become spoiled. Although *Ambāl* by herself can save them, she thought they would like to see Mother and Father together. 'Without appearing before people to bless them *Īsvara* keeps remaining in solitude, thus *Ambāl* thought to herself and she flickered her eyebrows in her worry. The one who had received the gift of life from her (Manmatha) took advantage of her knitted brows, using them as his bow. He speaks as if addressing *Ambāl*: 'I will come to your help, Mother. If I keep wielding this bow, at the appropriate moment, with my arrow I can turn him (*Īsvara*) away from his state of detachment. The last time when I approached him with my sugarcane bow, boasting that I could do it (make love spring in *Siva*'s heart for *Pārvathī*) I was reduced to ashes. But now I will reside in your face. *make* a bow and string (the stick of the bow and its string) with your eyebrows and eyes. I will not fail as I did last time. There is no doubt about my success this time.'

It is by being submissive to the knitting of the eyebrows by *Ambāl* that all great deities from *Brahmā* to *Sadāsiva* become engaged in their respective functions. Let us meditate on her knitted eyebrows and seek refuge in them. Manmatha then will flee from us.

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THE THREE EYES : THE THREE GUṆAS

The crown, the tresses of hair, the line of parting of the hair, the hair falling over the forehead, the forehead itself, the eyebrows: all these having been portrayed, *Ambāl*'s eyes are the next to be described. The eyes are of special importance to anyone. One of the endearing terms used in fondling children is 'O you my eye, O you the pupil of my eye!' (the apple of the eye). Nobody says, 'O my ear' or 'O my nose'! The goddess who is famous for her sidelong glance that expresses all her compassion has many names in which the eye figures as a suffix '*Kāmākshi*', '*Mūnākshi*', '*Viśālākshi*', '*Nīlāyathākshi*', '*Anjanākshi*'.

In the previous stanza (47) there was a passing reference to *Ambāl*'s eyes. The *Āchāryā* compares them to black bees. But more importance is given in that stanza to the goddess's eyebrows. And there is no mention at all in it of her forehead eye which is of special significance to her. The *Āchāryā* speaks of all her eyes in the present stanza (48).

Ahah sūthē savyam thava nayanam arkāthmakathayā
Thriyāmām vāmam thē srujathi rajanīnāyakathayā
Thruthiyā thē dhruṣṭih dharadhalitha-hēmaāmbuja-ruchih
Samādhaththē sandhyām dhivasa-niṣayōh antharacharīm

Ambāl's left and right eyes are like blue lotuses and shine like two black bees. The eye between them, the eye in the forehead, is different and is like molten gold. It is indeed like fire. We must have read about *Īśvara*'s forehead eye. When he opens it there is a blaze. The forehead eye is like fire.

The left and right eyes of *Ambikā* are the sun and the moon. In the (*Vedhic*) '*Purushasūktha*' alone is it mentioned that the moon was born of the mind of the Paramapurusha (the Supreme Being), that the sun was born of his eye-and only the sun-and that fire was born of his mouth.

All other texts, the *Śāsthras* and *Purāṇās* have it that the *Paramāthmā*'s right eye is the sun, that his left eye is the moon and that his forehead eye is Agni or fire.

When there is sun it is daytime. This is mentioned in the first line of the stanza. 'Your right eye'--'savyam nayanam' (the 'savyam' used in the previous stanza is seen here again)-having the character of the sun (arkah = sun; 'āthmakathagā' = having his nature or character); 'ahah' = daytime; 'sūthē' = creates, so says the *śloka*. 'Ahah' means daytime. 'Aharnisam', or 'ahorāthram', means day and night together. 'Your right eye having the nature of the sun creates daytime.'

In the second line the words 'thē vāmam' must be read with the word 'nayanam' added to them. Then you get the meaning, 'your left eye'. 'Your left eye is 'rajani-nāyakathayā'; that is your left eye has the nature of the lord of the night, i.e. the moon; 'thriyāmam srujathī', it creates night. A day has eight 'yāmas'. Of them, leaving daytime, dawn and dusk, the time of darkness is three yāmas, nine hours. So night is called 'thri-yāma'. 'Your left eye, having the nature of the moon, creates night.'

'Thruthīyā thē dhrushtih' = 'your third eye'. Apart from the left and right eyes is the eye in the forehead, and how is it? 'Dharadhalitha:' it has the beauty of a flower just unfolding, little by little. What other special quality does it have? 'Hēmāmbuja ruchih': it shines like a red golden lotus. 'Hēmāmbuja' = golden lotus. In the temple of *Minākshi* [in Mad(h)urai] there is a pond of golden lotuses. It is called 'Svarṇāpushkarinī' or 'Hēmapushkarinī'. *Ambāl*'s forehead eye is a golden lotus. The reference here is not to yellow gold, what is called 'mūsā gold'; but gold that has the hue of the rose, reddish gold.

The idea that the *Paramāthmā*'s right and left eyes create day and night has been expressed by many. Our *Āchāryā* has to add

something new. Others have not related the third eye to any part of the day. This is precisely what the *Āchāryā* does here, that too in a novel way. He says that the forehead eye creates that beautiful part of the day, the morning hour or twilight, after night and before daybreak; and dusk, i.e. the hour before night begins. '*Dhivasanīsayōh antharacharūm sandhyām samādhaththē.*'

'Dhivasam' means daytime. But, usually, words like 'dhivasam' 'dhinam', the Tamil '*nāl*' and the English 'day' denote a full day, the 24-hour period including daytime and night. This may be because it is during daytime that we do most of our work; we spend most of the night in sleep.

After speaking about daytime and night, can 'sandhya' be left out? *Hiraṇyakaśipu* received a boon according to which he was not to die either during day or at night. The Lord ingeniously used the time sandhya to 'finish him off'. There are two sandhyas, '*prāthah sandhya*' and '*sāyam sandhya*', dawn and dusk. During these two sandhyas our minds are naturally absorbed in the *Paramāthmā*. Sandhyavandana is the backbone of our religious observances. Can we fail to perform it? If *Ambāl*'s right and left eyes create daytime and night, has not the eye between them (the forehead eye) necessarily to create the two sandhyas, dawn and dusk? The skies during dawn and dusk are red and the forehead eye of *Ambāl* is a golden red. So there is no doubt that the two sandhyas are created by the eye in her forehead.

That *Ambāl* is Time personified is explained by the *Āchāryā* as he deals with her eyes.

Ambāl's eyes do not stop with creating the different periods of the day. The *Āchāryā* says in another stanza (53) that they create even the deities in charge of creation, sustenance and dissolution. Here all the three eyes are spoken of together. The three eyes have each a different colour, red, white and black, and

they represent the three *guṇas*, *rajas*, *sathva* and *thamas*. At the deluge it is from these eyes that *Ambāl* creates the deities for the conduct of cosmic affairs : *Brahmā* who is *rājasik*, *Vishṇu* who is *Sāthvik*, and *Rudra* who is *thāmasik*, to perform the functions of creation, sustenance and dissolution.

Although the function of dissolution is mentioned here, in another stanza (55), the *Āchāryā* wonders whether he should speak of *Ambāl*, who is Mother, as causing the deluge. So he states: 'When you shut your eyes the world will perish. When you open them it will rise again. With your heart of a Mother you now feel that the world that has risen must not be dissolved. That is why you remain without closing your eyes.' That the celestials do not close their eyes is well known. Celestials like *Indra* came disguising themselves as *Nālā* for the *svayamvara* of *Damayanthi*. *Damayanthi* was able to make out the true *Nālā* from the fact that his feet touched the ground and that he blinked his eyes. The *Āchāryā* says very beautifully that *Ambāl* does not wink her eyes because she thinks if she does so the world will perish. He speaks thus in appreciation of a Mother's heart.

The *Āchāryā* gives a description (in Stanza 54) of the three colours in the eyes of *Ambāl* which are different from what we have already seen, the three colours which are the source of the three *guṇas*. The *Ganga* looks white in colour: the river originating in the hair of the white complexioned *Śiva*. The *Yamuna* is dark. '*Kālā*' is dark as in the word '*kāla-mēgha*' (dark cloud). The *Yamuna* is also called '*Kālinḍhi*' and it is associated with *Krishṇa* which name also means dark. There is a third river (an invisible one) which is an underground stream joining the above two at *Prayāga* and it is called *Sarasvathī*. The *Āchāryā* speaks of the *Sōnā*, not of the *Sarasvathī*. The reason is it is red, the word '*sōnā*' itself means red. The redness of what we call '*aruna*' is *Sōnā*. If the *Ganga* stands for *Śiva*, the *Yamunā* for *Vishṇu*, *Sōnā* stands for

Ambāl. *Ambāl*'s pet son is *Vignēśvara*. In the *Sōnā* river you obtain the red stone called '*Sōnabhadra*' which represents *Vignēśvara*. In this river called *Sōne* [in the North] I have bathed and gathered from it a number of *Sonabhadra* stones. *Ambāl*'s eyes have the white look, the black look and the red look; they are the confluence of the three sacred rivers of the *Gangā*, the *Yamunā* and the *Sōnā*. So they are sinless, 'anagha'. ('Agham' = sin; 'anagham' = without sin, virtuous.) May *Ambāl*'s glance, which is the confluence of the three sacred rivers, wash away our sins and make us pure, so prays the *Āchāryā*. '*Pavithrikarthum nah*': here too, as usual, he uses the plural 'nah'. He prays on behalf of all of us. It is a universal prayer made by our *Āchāryā* who represents the pinnacle of sanctity.

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NĒTHRA AND KSHĒTHRA

Apparswāmigal has composed a *Thiruthāndagam* (devotional songs) called *Kshēthira Kovai* stringing together the names of a number of holy places. In the same way, the *Āchāryā* has composed a stanza on places (49), each name having two meanings.

Visālā Kalyāṇī sphutaruchir Ayōdhyā Kuvalayaiḥ
Krūpadhārādhārākimapimadhurā Bhōgavathikā
Avanthī dhruṣtis thē bahunagara-visthāra-vijayā
Dhruvam thaththannāma-vyavaharaṇa-yōgyā vijayathē.

Everybody would know that *Ayōdhyā*, *Dhara*, *Bhojarājā*'s capital, *Avanti* (*Ujjayini* is the same) are the names of cities. '*Visālā*' which comes first in the stanza is also the name of a place: it is another name for *Badarināth*. Devotees chant there: '*Jay Badarī-Visāl!*' There is a place called *Kalyāṇī*: which is in *Bidār* district, *Karnataka*. It was the capital of what was called *Kunthala*

dēsā during the *Āchāryā*'s time. In later centuries the *Chālukyās* of *Vātāpi*, after their fall, rose again as the *Chālukyās* of *Kalyānī* and ruled from this city.

Bhōgavati is another city. We have come to know that what is now called Kambat in Gujarat was Bhōgavati. 'Cambay' must be the anglicised form of Kambat. The arm of the Arabian Sea there is called the Gulf of Cambay. 'Bay' and 'gulf' are portions of the sea that seem to encroach into land or fill wide openings in it. A bay is wider than a gulf. The Bay of Bengal that stretches between India and Burma is big in area while the Gulf of Mannar is a narrow strip of sea between India and Sri Lanka. Though there is 'bay' in Cambay, the reference is to a gulf and not to a bay. The once famous port town of Kambat is Bhōgavati.

'Vijaya' does not refer to Hampi Vijayanagara in Bellary district, Karnataka; nor does it to the Vijayanagara principality of Srikākulam district, Andhra Pradesh, ruled by the famous Gajapathi rajas. In the old days the one was distinguished from the other by being differently spelt: the former as 'Vijaya' and the latter as 'Viziya' (or 'Vizia'). Hampi Vijayanagara was the capital of the famous Vijayanagara Empire. It was originally named by Bukkaraya after its founder Sri Vidhyaranyaswami. Then it came to be changed to Vijayanagara. The city was built in mid-14th century. The other Vijayanagara in Andhra Pradesh is also not known to have existed during the *Āchāryā*'s time. So the Vijaya mentioned by him must be some other ancient city. Perhaps Kurukshēthra. The *Gītā* concludes with the statement: 'Wherever *Krishṇa* is, wherever Arjuna is, there is Vijaya (victory).' Was it not in *Kurukshēthra* that *Krishṇa* taught Arjuna the *Gītā*? Arjuna is also called 'Vijaya' and *Krishṇa* blessed him with victory (vijaya) in the war.

The eight cities thus listed are not ordinary places. They are famous centres, '*Kshēthras*.' But what is their connection with

Ambāl? Her glance takes in the entire cosmos. It is also cast on all big cities and thereby wins over all those living in them with her compassion. A raja takes up arms, lays siege to cities and achieves victory over them. As for *Ambāl* she keeps enlarging her empire by casting her compassionate glance on city after city, town after town. Thus, although she conquers many a city, many a place, eight of them are important because of their receiving her special grace. Their names are mentioned in the stanza. We must note here that the names of these cities speak of what distinguishes *Ambāl*'s glance, its characteristics. Thus the *Āchāryā* has used words which yield two meanings.

The names of the eight cities, '*Visālā*', '*Kalyānī*', '*Ayōdhyā*' and so on, are associated with *Ambāl*'s dhrushti, her glance or look. The commentators have given accurate definitions of '*Visālā-dhrushti*', '*Kalyānī-dhrushti*' and so on. I will speak about them according to their generally understood meaning.

Since *Ambāl*'s glance is wide-ranging it is called '*Visālā*' and since it creates the well-being of all the world it is known as '*Kalyānī*.'

'*Ayōdhyā*' literally means that which cannot be defeated in war, invincible. The rulers of the *Itshvāku* dynasty built fortresses and made the city impregnable. We may also explain the meaning of the name thus: 'No enemy king ever dared to invade the city and capture it, so it does not know what is war--and thus *Ayōdhyā*.' How is this name related to *Ambāl*'s glance? Since dhrushti, glance, originates in the eye it is also referred to as the eye. The eye is usually compared to the kuvala or the kuvalaya, the blue water-lily: we read about 'kuvala eyes', 'eyes equal in beauty to kuvalaya flowers'. The *upamāna* [that with which something is compared] is sometimes sought to be downgraded by the *upamēya* [the subject of comparison]. In this manner we say, 'eyes that scoff at kuvalaya flowers'. This depreciation takes an 'aggressive' form

when we say, 'eyes that conquer kuvalaya flowers'. The *Āchāryā* here expresses the idea that *Ambāl*'s eyes are not capable of being conquered by kuvalaya flowers. He uses the word 'Ayodhya' for that which cannot be conquered: 'Ayodhyā kuvalayaih'.

Ambāl's glance is the source of a rain of compassion. The name of the city of *Dhārā* comes twice in the words, '*Krūpa-dhārā-adhārā*'. [The second '*Dhārā*' is in '*adhārā*'.] Is not *Dhārā* the city of Bhoja who was famous for his largesse? The words suggest that *Ambāl*'s compassion may be obtained in flow after flow.

Ambāl is the embodiment of sweetness. How nectarine must be her glance? That is why it is called 'madhura'. Mathura is a city in the North. The city of which we in the South are proud, Mad(h)urai, was the capital of the Pandyas.

They say *Bhōgavati* is a place in *Prayāga*. The capital of the netherworld and the *Gangā* that flows there are both known as *Bhogavati*. The *Gangā* flows not only in this world but also in the celestial world and the nether-world. In the celestial world it is called *Mandākini*, in this world it is *Bhāgīrathi* and in the nether world it is *Bhōgavati*. But since the *Āchāryā* speaks in these stanzas only of the cities of this world, there is no point in bringing in the *Gangā* of the nether world or its capital city. *Bhōgavati* must be what is now known as Kambat.

How does the name *Bhōgavati* relate to *Ambāl*'s glance? The word means that which is fit to be enjoyed. What greater joy can there be than that derived from *Ambāl*'s glance falling upon us? So it is indeed *Bhōgavati*. It gives pleasure to *Īśvarā*, so in that sense also the name is appropriate.

'*Avantī*' means that which protects (act of protecting). The term, '*māmava*' occurs in a number of (Carnatic) musical compositions '*Māmava*' = '*mām ava*' = 'protect me.' 'Ava' means

‘protect’ and ‘avanam’ is protection; and ‘Avanti’ is the act of protecting. *Ambāl’s* glance is a big protection, hence ‘Avanti’. Ujjayini, *Vikramādhityā’s* capital, is also called *Avantī*. Both the kingdom and its capital have the same name, ‘*Avantī*’. So as to avoid any confusion, it is said, *Avantī* came to mean the kingdom and Ujjayini, the capital. This *Avantī* (Ujjayini) also had the name of ‘*Viśāla*’.

Āyōdhya, Mathura (let us assume the Northern city) and *Avantī* are three of the seven *mōksha-puris* (cities of liberation).

I have already spoken about *Vijayā*. Since *Ambāl* makes a triumphant tour of the cities her glance is *Vijayā*: ‘*bahunagara-vistāra-vijayā*.’

Even if *Ambāl’s* glance falls on all the cities of the world, the eight mentioned in the stanza are special since they have the distinction of being named after the qualities of her dhṛushti like *Viśālā*, *Kalyānā* and so on. In pursuance of poetic beauty, the *Āchāryā* changes this and says that *Ambāl’s* glance merits being known after the names of these cities: ‘*Thath thath nama vyavaharana-yōgyā vijayathē*’. ‘All those cities that receive the glance of *Ambāl* in the course of her wide-ranging triumphant tour, those glances shine as deserving of being called after them.’

‘Nayanam’ means ‘leading’. It is because the eye shows the way that we are able to walk (to move about). It means it is our leader. The leader is called ‘*nāyaka*’ and the word is related to ‘*naya*’. ‘*Nēta*’ also means one who is in the forefront and shows the way. ‘*Nēthra*’ and ‘*neta*’ are related words like ‘*nayana*’ and ‘*nāyaka*’. With the help of *Ambāl’s* eyes that lead us on the path of *srēyas*, the *Āchāryā* undertakes a countrywide pilgrimage through this stanza.

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AMBĀL'S EYES AND POETRY

In the next stanza (50) the *Āchāryā* relates *Ambāl's* eyes directly to poetry.

Kavīnām san darbha-sthabaka-makarandhaika-rasikam
Katāksha-vyākshēpa-bhramarakalabhau karṇāyugalam
Amunchanthau dhruṣhtvā thava navarasasvādha-tharalāv
Asūyā-samsargādhalkanayanam kinchidharuṇam

'*Asūyā samsargāth*': because of jealousy. Who is jealous? Jealous of what or of whom? In the presence of *Parāśakthi* how can there be jealousy. The jealousy is in *Ambāl's* own eyes. More correctly one eye is jealous of the other two. 'Alikam' = forehead. 'Alikā -nayanam' = the forehead eye. The third eye is jealous and has become bloodshot, a little red, because of it. 'Kinchith' = a little bit; 'aruṇam' = red.

Poets wonder why that eye is red and try to explain the fact by saying that *Ambāl's* left and right eyes are the moon and the sun and that her third eye is fire and therefore red. This is not entirely correct. If you say that the eye in the forehead is fire and therefore red, what about the other two eyes? The right eye [following this logic] must have some sign to denote that it is the sun and the left eye similarly must have some sign to show that it is the moon. But in the case of both you do not see any signs [to show what they are]. The right eye that should be burning like the sun and the left eye that should be raining moonlight are entirely alike: and the two rain the nectar of *Ambāl's* sidelong glances. So we cannot accept the view that the third eye should be red since, metaphorically speaking, it is fire.

The *Āchāryā* gives a reason for the third eye being red and it is different from that given by ordinary poets. In the beginning all three eyes were the same colour, that is they were like black water-lilies. Now the forehead eye alone has changed to red. When

one becomes jealous or envious one's face becomes red, does it not? Similarly, *Ambāl*'s third eye has been affected by jealousy. In fact it is intensely affected by jealousy. That is why it has become red, observes the *Āchāryā*.

'Is such an explanation adequate? If the eye of *jñāna* of the Supreme Being (*Ambāl*) is affected by jealousy, the reasons for the same must be given, how, why and so on. It must be proved point by point; only then can we accept the view that the eye is burning with jealousy.'

'That's all you need? The eye in the forehead is indeed jealous of the other two eyes and it can be easily proved.' And it is in pursuance of this idea that the *Āchāryā* has composed the stanza.

As great poets compose hymns to *Ambāl*, hymns that arouse our sense of wonder, she listens intently to them. Being a great *rasika*, connoisseur, her ears imbibe the *rasa* of these hymns with such great interest as to make one think that they have assumed a special shape for the purpose. The concatenation of place, meaning, and so on that creates a favourable atmosphere for something is understood as 'sandarbha'. Any weaving together of factors is *sandarbha*. Thus when the characters of the story told by a poem, the events and the various emotional states it describes and the ideas thrown up by the poet's imagination, the words and metre he employs are woven together, the resultant literary work is 'sandarbha'. In the present stanza the term refers to such poetic compositions, 'sthabakas', brought together by poets. A 'sthabaka' is a bunch of flowers, a nosegay. Here it means a bouquet of words. A bunch of flowers also means the nectar exuded by it. Thus from the poetic nosegay flow the nine *rasas* as nectar. This nectar is the only sustenance for the ear of *Ambāl* personified. 'He' (the ear personified) does not eat anything else.

‘Makaranda rasikam- makaranda eka rasikam’ : this nectar is the only thing that ‘he’ takes with relish.

The *Āchāryā* uses the term ‘makarandaika rasikam’ in an earlier stanza (38) in which he speaks of *Śiva* and *Śakthi* residing as a pair of hamsas in the *anāhata chakra*. He mentions that they imbibe with relish the nectar in the lotus of *jnāna* called ‘samvith’. Indeed they take in nothing other than this nectar: ‘*Samunmīlath samvithkamala-makarandaika rasikam.*’

The two ears that take delight in imbibing the nectar [poetic rasa] produced by great poets is referred to in this stanza (50) as ‘*karnāyugalam*’. But why is so much importance given to the ears in the context of dealing with the eyes? There is a reason.

What are the right and left eyes of *Ambāl* like? In Sanskrit they are said to be ‘*karnāntha-vīśrāntha-nēthram*’. The Supreme Being’s eyes are so long that they touch the ears. If you happen to touch a cup brimming with honey, is not the next step of yours that of drinking it? Thus the eyes that touch the ear-cups of *Ambāl* that are brimful of nectar become engrossed in imbibing it, tasting the sweet flavour of poetry. ‘Amunchanthau,’ says the *Āchāryā* : the eyes refuse to be parted from the ears and remain sticking to them. *Ambāl*’s left and right eyes send their glances to their corners and through them start partaking of the poetic nectar with which her ears are filled. The glances are appropriately enough called little black bees. In a previous stanza the *Āchāryā* says that the string of bees (of Manmatha’s bow) is made up of *Ambāl*’s glances. ‘Bhramara’ means bee. In *Śrīsaila*, *Ambāl* is called ‘*Bhramarāmbikā*’, meaning ‘Bee Mother’. Why Bee Mother? Because the Father there is the Mallika flower (jasmine), Mallikarjuna. *Ambāl* as *Bhramarāmbāl* buzzes around the flower and imbibes the nectar of *Śivānanda*. ‘Bhramara-kalabhau’. ‘Kalabha’ is a young one. When one is young one has the tendency

to keep eating all the time. The hunger of *Ambāl*'s eyes for the nectar of poetry is insatiable. That is why they are called 'Bhramara-kalabhau'.

In this *Ambāl* practises a little bit of deception. She has the responsibility of curbing the world's *thāpa* and *pāpa* (suffering and sinfulness). It is in the midst of carrying out this duty that she is lured by the beauty of the compositions of great poets. She would earn a bad name if she were to be guilty of dereliction of duty and keep listening to the songs of the poets. She thinks about it, and what she does is indeed a little bit of deception. 'Let my sidelong glance be my blessing. The ambrosia of the sidelong glance will assuage the world's suffering and sinfulness. At the same time I can keep imbibing the nectar of poetry.' Thus she achieves her twin objective by performing a single task.

'*Katāksha vyākshēpa*': '*vyākshēpa*' is a kind of deceit, a pretext; '*katāksha*' is the corner of the eye, sidelong glance. The sidelong glance has a special distinction. Greater value is attached to looking at a thing tenderly with the corner of the eye than looking straight at it; it has also greater beauty and greater grace.

'It's all for the good,' *Ambāl* thinks to herself. 'It is only when the bees that are my glances go near my ears can they partake of the honey of the literary nosegay of the poets, '*kavīnām-sandarbhā*-sthabakamakaramdam'. At the same time, since they go up to the corners of my eyes, it will mean that my blessings are granted to the world through my sidelong glances. Instead of abandoning my duty of protecting the world so that I can listen to poetry and music, it will mean delighting myself in the beauty of literary compositions and at the same time of doing the duty of protecting the world through my sidelong glances,' thus thinking *Ambāl* knots together the two (protecting the world and listening to poetry) into a single act.

Under the pretext of her sidelong glances - there is a trick or a bit of deceit in saying so- *Ambāl* relishes the *rasa* of poetry: this is said in fun and in doing so the *Āchāryā* has his poetic licence with a view to enhancing the beauty of the passage in question. As a matter of fact, even though we do not deserve the compassion bestowed by the goddess through her sidelong glance, she rains it without any reason for the same. So it is said that she is '*avyāja-krupā-katākshī*' [*'Avyāja - karuṇā - mūrthi*']. The purpose here is to speak about her high aesthetic sense. The *Āchāryā* indulges in a bit of fun by stating that *Ambāl* blesses the world under the pretext of listening to poetry.

Let that be. What about the jealousy of the third eye?

It is only the left and right eyes that reach up to the ears. So they can, on the pretext of bestowing *Ambāl*'s sidelong glances, manage to reach up to her ears and partake of the nectar of poetry. -As for the third eye it is situated vertically in the forehead. Its look can take in the space between the eyebrows and the point of the parting of the hair. There is no question of its glance reaching up to the ears.

When the left and right eyes, through their glances (that are bees), are able to become sated with the nectar of the poetry dedicated to *Īśvarā*, the nectar that comes flooding, the forehead eye feels sad that it alone cannot have even a droplet of that nectar. So it becomes jealous of the other two eyes. And from jealousy springs anger which tinges the eye with a little red.

'It is not the eye of fire or any such thing. It is envy that has made *Ambāl*'s forehead eye red,' observes the *Āchāryā* and puts forward his points to prove his statement.

That *Ambāl* takes delight in the hymns in praise of *Īśvara* is not actually supported by this stanza. Such an idea somehow occurred to me. In two stanzas that come later (60 and 66) there is

mention of *Ambāl* taking delight in *Sarasvathī* playing the *vīṇā*. In one of them (66) occurs the words, '*vividham apadhānam Paśupatheh*': *Sarasvathī* sings the many sports of *Paśupathi* as she plays the *vīṇā*. I had this in mind when I spoke about *Ambāl* taking delight in the hymns in praise of *Īśvarā*. This is a subject that deserves to be elaborated upon separately.

The other stanza (60) which says that *Ambāl* takes delight in *Sarasvathī* singing - '*Sarasvatyāḥ sūkthih amruthalaharī kausalaharīh*' - starts with a line in which the word '*laharī*' comes twice. We have already dealt with *Ānandalaharī*, *Saundaryalaharī*, *Chidānandalaharī* and *Srungāralaharī*. Here, though two more '*laharīs*' are apparently added, in reality there is only one, the other being part of word play. '*Amruthalaharī*' is truly one of the *laharīs*. But '*kausalaharī*' is not to be split into '*kausa*' and '*laharī*': It is '*kausala*' and '*harī*'.

'*Amruthalaharī*' is a flood of ambrosia. *Sarasvathī*'s '*sūkthi*' is her sweet speech. ('*Sūkthi*', '*sūktha*' = su = uktam, well-spoken. The *Vedhic* hymns are *sūkthas*: '*Purushasūktha*', '*Śrīsūktha*', '*Rudrasūktha*' '*Durgasūktha*' and so on.) *Sarasvathī*'s speech is such as to detract from the excellence of the ambrosia even when it comes as a flood, in other words it is sweeter than ambrosia. This is the meaning of '*amruthalaharī kausala-harī*'. '*Kausala*' is skill or excellence; '*harī*' is stealing or robbing. *Ambāl*'s ears which were earlier described as relishing the honey of the hymns of poets, the *Āchāryā* now describes as the '*chulukā*' to contain *Sarasvathī*'s *sukthis*. A *chuluka* is a small water-pot. The *Āchāryā* gives *chulukā* here the form of a person. When *Ambāl* shakes her head in appreciation of *Sarasvathī*'s music, her ear ornaments jingle. This, says the *Āchāryā*, stands for the appreciation expressed by the 'ear-man' in response to *Sarasvathī*'s singing.

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THE EYE : ABODE OF THE NINE RASAS

After mentioning how the eyes delight themselves in the nine rasas, the *Āchāryā* describes how they (the eyes) themselves express these rasas on different occasions (Stanza 51).

*Śivē srungārārdhrā thadhitharajanē kuthsanaparā
Sarōshā Gangāyām Girīśacharithē vismayavathī
Harāhibhyō bhīthā sarasiruha-saubhāgyayanarī
Sakhīshu smērā thē mayī janani dhrushtih sakaruṇā*

All emotional states or rasas are revealed through the eyes. The eyes reflect all feelings and urges. No emotion, no feeling, can be shown through the ears. The lips quivering in a particular manner may show anger or sorrow. When you laugh there is a particular kind of lip and facial movement. When you draw breath noisily it means that you are sorrowful, that you are sobbing. However, the eyes alone can reveal all your emotions. Love or desire, sorrow or anger, valour or disgust, envy or fear-and *sāntā* or tranquillity-all these are revealed by the eyes as a mirror of the mind. *Karuṇā* among the rasas of dramaturgy denotes *sōka* or sorrow. This *karuṇā* as well as the *karuṇā* or compassion of the Lord or *Ambāl* revealed through their sidelong glances is also expressed by the eyes. When an artist paints a portrait he has to depict the eyes with care so as to reveal the mental state of the subject of the portrait, his or her feelings. If the look of the eye is changed a bit the expression too will change. In the same way a dancer (or an actor or actress) must portray the feelings of a character or enact a scene with proper eye movements.

The *Āchāryā* speaks here of all the nine rasas flowing from the eyes of *Parāśakti* who conducts the drama of the world. When do they fill with *srungara rasa*, the sentiment of love or the erotic mood? Everybody knows the answer to this. *Ambāl*'s *srungara* is only for *Paramēśvarā*: '*Śivē srungārārdhrā*.' '*Ārdhrā*' means 'one

who is wet, drenched'. *Ambāl* is drenched in her love for *Śiva*. She bathes *Śiva* who is as white as crystal in the brilliance of her red and makes him an embodiment of love, states the *Āchāryā* in another stanza (92).

You desire to possess an object when you see it-this is *Srungāra*. Quite the opposite of this is to feel revulsion for it when you see it. The opposite of *Srungāra* is not *raudra* born of anger. *Srungāra* has no reason behind it. They say 'Love is blind.' A millipede does not do us any harm, but we shrink from it in disgust for no reason. This is the opposite of *Srungāra* and it is *bhībhatsa rasa* (disgust).

We are so full of impurities and undesirable qualities that *Ambāl* should shrink from us in revulsion. But she is our Mother and she keeps us close to herself. Does she at any time betray feelings of *bhībhatsa*, that is disgust? Yes. If those belonging to the male sex, save *Īśvara* himself, approach her in an attitude other than that of regarding themselves as her children, she is unable to resist her feelings of revulsion and her eyes betray *bhībhatsa*. *Śiva* himself once came to her in disguise to test her and spoke ill of himself. She could not stand it and the feelings of *bhībhatsa* she felt at the time is described beautifully by *Kālidāsa* in his *Kumārasambhavam*.

'*Thath ithara janē kuthsana parā*': 'thath-ithara' = other than *Śiva*; 'janā' = with all people; 'kuthsana-para' = has disgust; 'kuthsana' means the same as *bhībhatsa*. On such occasions her look will betray *bhībhatsa*. Or she will reveal her disgust by closing her eyes.

When do *Ambāl*'s eyes reveal *raudra* (intense anger)?

'*Sarōshā Gangāyām*.'

'*Rōsha*' and '*raudra*' are the same. *Īśvara* has 'another woman', *Gangā*, and he holds her on his head. Anger wells up in

Ambāl only when she sees Ganga. It is due to hatred for a *sakalathri*. 'Kalathri' means wife; 'sakalathri' is another wife. Her husband *Śiva* has given half of his body to *Ambāl* but he holds Ganga on his head [in his matted hair]. *Ambāl* is not angry with her husband for this. After all, she is a pathivrathā and her anger is directed against *Gangā*. The *Āchāryā* speaks of *Ambāl* taking her in this context for a human being [or as one with attitudes and emotions that are human].

'*Adhbbhutha*' is another rasa. It is the sense of wonder or marvel aroused by something. When is it revealed in *Ambāl*'s eyes? '*Girīsācharithē vismāyāthi*.' 'Vismayam' is amazement. '*Girīśa*' and '*Girīśa*' are two among the names of *Śiva*. *Girīśa* means king of the *Kailāsā* mountain and *Girīśa* means one who resides on that mountain. *Ambāl* is lost in wonder as she listens to the story of *Kailāsanātha*, that is *Śiva*. When she listens to accounts of his sport, when she thinks of them, remembers them, she is seized by wonder. There is no end to the sport of *Śiva*. *Nīlakanta Dikshita* has composed a long poem called *Śivalīlāṛṇavam*. '*Āṛṇavam*' means ocean. The slaying of *Thripura*, the burning of *Manmatha*, the killing of *Gajāśura* (elephant demon), the destruction of *Kāla*, the slaying of the demon *Antaka*, swallowing the poison called *Hālāhala*, all these are part of the story of *Śiva*, as also his role as a mendicant, his *thāṇḍava* dance as *Nataraja*, his sport of *Hālāśya*: as many as 64 kinds of sport or *līlā*, or more, are told of him. It is from such a lake of stories that *Śivānandalahari* rises, observes the *Āchāryā* in his hymn so named. The one who has no function to perform, the one who is quiescent, came to be involved in many a sport and, according to the *Saundaryalaharī*, it was *Ambāl* who activated him in this manner. If *Ambāl* is lost in wonder for *Śiva*'s sport, we are lost in wonder as we think of *Ambāl* making *Sthāṇunātha* one who is like a dry log of wood perform such sport.

Then comes the rasa 'bhayānaka', fearful or terrible [that which causes fear or terror]. *Ambāl* is the personification of abhaya and the refuge of all of us who die of fear for one reason or another. We saw in an earlier stanza (4) that her feet grant vara and abhaya (boons and freedom from fear). She is called 'Abhayāmbikā.' How can one like her be subject to fear herself?

Yes, she can be. It is all part of her sport. There is a snake, *Nāga*, entwining the *Śivalinga*. It is in fact *Ambāl* herself. In each individual she dwells as the snake called Kuṇḍalinī. Even so it seems she trembles as she sees the snakes worn by *Paramēśvara*. Showing such fear is part of her sport. '*Harāhibhyō bhītā*': '*Hara*', (that of) *Isvara*; '*ahibhyō*', of snakes; '*bhītha*', being afraid.

Then the *Āchāryā* comes to *vīra* rasa. *Ambāl* was *vīra*, valour or heroism incarnate during her exploits like the slaying of *Mahishāsura*, *Bhandāsura* and others. But the *Āchāryā* seems reluctant to associate *Ambāl* with deeds of violence. So he says that *Ambāl*'s eyes betray *vīra* rasa in vanquishing the lustre of the lotus. But not exactly so. Perhaps the *Āchāryā* does not want to suggest anything like a quarrel by saying that she 'vanquishes the lustre of the lotus' [he does not want to suggest any violence on the part of *Ambāl*]. So he says, instead, that *Ambāl* is the one who brings forth the lustre of the lotus: '*Sarasiruha-saubhāgyajanani*.' Red colour itself indicates valour, *vīra* rasa. So if it is said that she creates the red colour in the lotus, it means that 'she showers' *vīra* rasa. Eminent scholars have interpreted the idea thus.

There is another version of the text in which 'jayinī' is used instead of '*jananī*.' '*Jayinī*' reminds us of the latter part of the name of the city, 'Ujjayini.' In this version *Ambāl*'s valour is clearly indicated by the statement that she 'triumphs over the lustre of the lotus.'

Whether we say that *Ambāl*'s eyes create the beauty of the lotus or that they triumph over that beauty, in either case the eyes

have a part in them and for this reason specially noteworthy. What we saw until now was that the rasas were reflected in *Ambāl*'s eyes as reactions to things external to them. But now the beauty of the lotus, or of *Ambāl*'s eyes triumphing over it, is the 'direct action' of those eyes.

What about *hāsyā* rasa, mirth? They speak of comedy - and life is so full of tragedy that we yearn for mirth, for humour. The *Āchāryā* deals with this rasa also. '*Sakhīshu smerā*': *Ambāl* creates mirthfulness as she speaks to her companions and her speech is mingled with laughter. The twinkle in her eyes on such occasions is usually referred to as her mischievous look.

So far we have seen seven of the nine rasas love, disgust, wrathfulness, wonder, terror, valour and mirth. Two more remain - *sōka* that is *karuṇā* and *sānta*.

Ambāl who is the personification of bliss enacted the rasas mentioned so far as part of her sport. The *Āchāryā* is unable to speak in the same manner about the *sōka* rasa enacted by her eyes. During the sacrifice conducted by Dhaksha she [as Sathī] gave way to grief and was indeed inconsolable. In a number of Puranas there are accounts of *Īśvara* cursing her for one reason or another and of her going to him in tears asking him his forgiveness. But the *Bhagavatpādhā* does not have the heart to retell stories connected with these incidents. In a previous stanza (47) he speaks about how *Ambāl* was sad that people involved in worldly existence were full of fear and how she banishes their fear (frees them from it). It means that because of her compassion she becomes a little sorrowful. In this stanza he integrates *Ambāl*'s compassion with her sorrow, integrates *karuṇā* (compassion) with *karuṇā* (*sōka*), '*Bhuvanabhayaabhangā-vyasanini*'. If *Ambāl* rains her *karuṇā* rasa on an individual what is implied in it? 'Poor man,' she exclaims, thinking of him. She sympathises with him and lifts him up. When she sees a man in great sorrow, that is in the state of *karuṇā* or

sōka, out of sympathy for him she showers on him her sidelong glance of *karuṇā* (compassion). In her sympathy for the man it comes about that she shares his sōka or *karuṇā* rasa. So in this subtle fashion the *Āchāryā* shows how she experiences sōka by means of her *karuṇā* or compassion. And, at the same time, he says all this in a profoundly touching manner. The *Āchāryā* himself, because of his sympathy and compassion for suffering mankind, becomes their 'spokesman' and prays to *Ambāl* on their behalf for her compassion.

'The mayi, Janani, dhrushtih sakaruṇā.'

'O Mother, may your glance, which shows different rasas, be full of compassion for me.'

In earlier stanzas we saw that the *Āchāryā*, whenever he prayed to *Ambāl*, did so for all of us, using the word 'nah.' Why does he here ask for compassion only for himself while praying to *Ambāl* in his state of distress. He uses the word 'mayi' ('for me'). There is a deep inner meaning in this. Here he represents all mankind. So what apparently seems a prayer for a single individual like himself is in reality a prayer on behalf of everybody. By making all recite this stanza he makes them deserving specially of her compassionate sidelong glance. This *karuṇā* rasa of *Ambāl* alone is related to the one who prays to her, the rest of the rasas reflected in her eyes being due to other causes.

How is it that the stanza is complete with eight of the nine rasas only? What about the ninth?

Savouring the eight rasas as an aesthetic experience and empathizing oneself with the states represented by them will itself mean santa rasa, the mood of tranquillity. *Ambāl* herself is basically an embodiment of tranquillity; she is in the state of *Śiva*. In fact the word '*Śive*' in this stanza denotes santa. The *Āchāryā*, who says at the very beginning of the hymn (Stanza 1) that without

Śakthi Śiva remains still and serene, begins the present stanza with 'Śivē.' By this a great truth is proclaimed that it is this state of quietude and tranquillity (*sānta*) that pulsated and evolved into the eight rasas. The idea underlying the hymn throughout is that *Ambāl* is the functioning Brahman; so the *Āchāryā* must have thought of hinting at *sānta* in this oblique manner.

The very first stanza of the hymn starts with 'Śiva' and this stanza which begins with 'Śivē' is the 51st of the hymn, which means half of the hymn is completed with it. Among the four *Vēdhās*, the name of *Śiva* occupies a central, commanding, place: the *Āchāryā* has blessed us with the *Saundaryalaharī* which likewise, has the same name occupying a central position.

'There are only eight rasas. There is in fact no such rasa as *santa* at all. A rasa implies linking of a number of factors: the one who experiences it, the experience itself, the accompanying emotion and its arousal, the subject that causes it. *Sānta* is admittedly a great experience. It is a quiet and serene state, a state of equanimity in which all emotions are submerged. How can it be called a rasa, then?' some authorities on poetics ask. But there is another school of aesthetics according to which *sānta* too, like other rasas, is produced by special circumstances and that it has its own background and other factors that cause it. They also mention the signs indicating it and the *upa-bhāvas* (the subsidiary *bhāvas*) of this basic *bhāva*. 'This too is a rasa,' they declare. 'In fact it is the rasa among rasas.'

In the previous stanza, the *Āchāryā* speaks of 'navarasās vādhatharalau.' If he mentions in the present stanza how the rasas of dramaturgy are reflected in the eyes of *Ambāl*, it is logical for him to include *sānta* also among them. There is another confirmation of this point and it is afforded by the next stanza (52). In it the *Āchāryā* says that Manmatha makes *Ambāl's* glance itself his arrow and, discharging it at *Śiva*, drives away the

Lord's mood of tranquillity (*sānta rasa*). '*Purām bhēththuh chiththaprasama-rasa-vidhrāvaṇa*': 'by driving away the 'prasama' in the mind of *Śiva*, the Purari.' '*Sāma*' means containment of the mind and the word '*sānti*' is derived from it. We speak of '*prasānti*' which is taking *sānti* many steps higher. In the same way '*prasama*' is a few degrees higher than '*sāma*.' '*Prasama rasa*' is of course *sānta rasa*.

Earlier when the *Āchāryā* spoke about *Ānandabhairava* and *Ānandabhairavi* dancing together in the *mūlādhāra* he referred to '*navarasamahāthāṇḍava*' (Stanza 41). So it is proved beyond doubt that the *Āchāryā* accepted the concept of the nine rasas. However, it seems he has not elaborated upon the *sānta rasa* with regard to *Ambāl* because if she, who is *Śakthi*, were to become tranquil she would cease to have vibrations and she would herself become one like *Śiva* as mentioned in the first stanza.

If some maintain that there are only eight rasas, some others believe that there are ten including, apart from *sānta*, the *rasa* of '*vāthsalya*' [affection as shown between parents and children]. They think it is 'weighty' enough to be thought of as a *rasa*. There is *vāthsalya* in the *Āchāryā* addressing *Ambāl* as 'Mother' and regarding himself as a child of hers 'mayi, Janani, dhrushtih sakarunā.'

The *Āchāryā* shows his genius by speaking explicitly about eight of the ten rasas [ten including *sānta* and *vāthsalya*] and hinting at the remaining two rasas that are associated with just one part of *Ambāl*'s body [that is her eyes].

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'MĪNALŌCHANĀ' HINTED AT

Among the many beauties hinted at, in the *Saundaryalaharī*, *Mīnākshī* is one and she is also connected with the eyes. Is not

Mīnākshī the same as '*Mīnanēthri*', '*Mīnalōchanī*'? The *Mīnāmbikā* of Madurai is famous and she is one who grants boons to her devotees. She who has existed from the very beginning of Time up till now is named after her eyes. However, her name does not occur in the two devotional works that are like the two eyes among the hymns to the goddess, the *Sahasranāmam* and the *Saundaryalaharī*. We think of it as a drawback and feel disappointed because of it.

But, on careful examination of the two hymns, we will realise that there is no cause for disappointment. In both, although the name *Mīnākshī* as such does not occur, it is hinted at or suggested, that is there is a '*sūchanā*' (hint) of it. That her name is not explicitly mentioned shows that she has a special distinction. Is not the subtle superior to the gross?

As the *Lalithā-Sahasranāmam* goes on describing *Ambāl*, there occurs the name of '*Vakthra-Lakshmi-parīvāha-chalan-mīnābhalōchanā*' '*Vakthra-Lakshmi*' means the glow of *Ambāl*'s face. It exists as a great flow - '*parīvāha*'. If the radiance of the face becomes a stream there must be fish in it. Where do you find the fish in this ocean of tranquillity?

The elongated eyes of *Ambāl* are indeed the fish. '*Lōchana*' means eye. ('*Lōkanam*' means seeing. The world is called '*loka*' as a visible phenomenon). The eye that is like a fish is '*mīnābhalōchanā*'. Though the name of '*Mīnākshī*' as such is not mentioned in the *Sahasranāmam*, it is suggested by the word '*Mīnābhalōchanā*'.

Here we have found an answer to one shortcoming.

What now about the *Saundaryalaharī*? In the stanza in which *Ambāl*'s eyes are brought in relation to a number of cities, Mathura (Madhura) is mentioned and we may take it to mean the Southern city of Madurai. So, although the name of *Mīnākshī* is

not mentioned, her city is. Apart from that, one of the stanzas describing *Ambāl*'s eyes has these two opening lines (Stanza 56):

Thavāparṇēkarnē japanayana-paiṣunya-chakithā
Niliyanthē-thōyē niya thamanimēshah sapharikāh

'*Aparṇē*': O *Ambikā* with the name of *Aparṇā*! *Ambāl* was born the daughter of the mountain (*Parvatharājakumāri*) and, wanting to marry *Paramēśvarā*, performed severe austerities. During this time the rishis sustained themselves on the leaves falling (naturally) from the trees But she, the daughter of the mountain, would not do even that and hers was a total fast. For this reason she earned the name of '*Aparṇā*', says *Kālidāsa*. '*Parṇam*' is leaf; she who did not eat even leaves is '*Aparṇā*'. '*Thava*' = your; '*karnē*' = in the ear, to the ear: '*japa-nayanē*' = eyes that seemed to speak, to mutter: '*paiṣunya-chakithah*' = afraid that tales were being told about them; '*sapharikāh*' = female fish; '*animēshāh*' = without closing their eyes; '*thōyē*' = in the water; '*niliyanthē*' = become immersed; '*niyatham*' = certainly.

Why is it that fish always keep swimming under the water and not on its surface? The *Āchāryā* thinks of a reason for this here. The fish see *Ambāl*'s eyes stretching up to her ears. The World Mother turns her look to every nook and corner of the world and to every blade of grass and to every worm and insect. Every time she looks out of the corner of her eye, it (the eye) seems to touch the ear and whisper a secret in it-so it seems to the fish. And what is the secret? In shape the eyes resemble the fish. They are tremulous as they take in the entire world so as to bless it. The fish seem to 'copy' the movement of *Ambāl*'s eyes by keeping always aswim under the water. But they are afraid of the possibility that the eyes may be complaining to *Ambāl* about them, whispering in her ears, 'The fish are competing with us.' After listening to their 'petition', if *Parāsakthi* decides to take action

against these lowly creatures? It is because of this fear that the fish keep swimming under the water instead of on its surface.

Just as *Duryōdhana*, after he had suffered defeat at the hands of Bhima, hid in a cavern in a pond, so the fish, afraid of the beauty of *Ambālī*'s eyes, go deep under the water.

'*Sapharikā*' means female fish. '*Paisunya*' is telling tales about somebody (ratting). '*Chakithā*' means trembling with fear. Afraid that if they go to battle with *Ambālī*'s eyes they would suffer defeat both in the matter of their beauty and in their ability to swim about, they live incognito under the water.

There are no fish in the pond of the golden lotuses of the temple of *Mīnākshī* in Madurai. The reason is that, shamed by the beauty of the eyes of the goddess, the fish do not 'raise their heads' [they are not seen].

By likening the eyes of *Ambālī* to fish and by stating that the fish go into hiding shamed by the beauty of those eyes, the *Āchāryā* brings in *Mīnākshī* by suggestion in the stanza, that is by '*sūchana*'.

In this way what we thought to be a second drawback of the hymn is also removed.

'*Animēshāh*': without closing the eyes, says the hymn about the fish. ('*Nimisha*' is the time taken for the twinkling of an eye.) That *Ambālī* does not close her eyes was mentioned in an earlier stanza and the very word '*animēshā*' was used there. The world is created as she opens her eyes and it is destroyed as she closes them. She does not close her eyes for the reason that the world should not perish. In the celestial world no one closes his or her eyes. In the case of *Ambālī* the *Āchāryā* says that she does not close her eyes because of her desire to keep the world alive. Another reason also occurs to me. During the fraction of a second taken for the twinkling of her eye, the children of the world

(*Ambāl's* children) will be denied the ambrosia of her sidelong glance.

Why does the *Āchāryā* say the same thing about fish? (That they do not close their eyes.) There is a belief that fish do not sleep. The fish (referred to in the stanza) go deep into the water and remain alert, the reason being they are afraid that *Ambāl* will come to fight with them because of her eyes telling tales in her ears.

* * *

'MOTHER, BATHE ME TOO IN YOUR GRACE'

After the stanza in which *Mīnākshī* is called to mind, there are a number of *ślokas* that deeply touch our hearts, and one of them (57) is a prayer to *Ambikā's* sidelong glance made with a heart that melts in devotion. It is a stanza in which flows the *Āchāryā's* verbal nectar and it is composed when the nectar welling up in *Ambāl's* sidelong glance flows fully towards him. However, instead of saying that the goddess's sidelong glance has come to him in a flow and become 'collected' in him, he prays to her in utter humility for the same (for her sidelong glance). The *Āchāryā* in fact says that he *too* must receive *Ambāl's* glance and he does so without any trace of ego in him. As one who is the pinnacle of devotion and jnana and poetic genius he prays thus for *Ambāl's* grace.

Many great devotees like the *Nāyanmārs* (*Śaiva* saints) and the *Āzhvārs* (*Vaiṣṇava* saints), who had a vision of the Lord and who have had the experience of divinity, have prayed, lamenting, 'Will not this *lowly one* be vouchsafed your *dharsan*?' Why do they act or speak like this? We who do not come face to face with the Lord do not know to lament with intensity that we have not been granted his *dharsan*. So the Lord who is resolved to wash away the sins of those who pray to him with intense devotion

thinks to himself: 'These people do not know how to pray with all their heart and lament with deep feeling that they have not had my *dharsan*. So I must teach them how to do it.' He reveals his words of grace only through those who have realised him inwardly. He inspires these great men who delight themselves in him to speak his words, words that would constitute a 'model' for us to lament with devotion that we have not had his *dharsan*. It is thus that *Ambāl* has inspired the *Āchāryā* to pray with a heart that melts in devotion for her and speak words that should be an example for us to include in our prayers.

Dhrusā dhrāghīyasyā dharadhalitha-nīlōthpala-ruchā
Dhavīyāmsam dhīnam snapaya krupayā māmapi Sivē
Anēnāyam dhanyō bhavathi na cha thēhāniriyathā
Vanē va harmyē vā samakaranipāthō himakarah

'*Dhrusā*': the opening word speaks of *dhrushti*; we may take it to mean 'with the eyes', 'through the look'. The reference is to *Ambāl*'s eyes, her glance.

'*Dhrāghīyasyā*' = longer than anything else; the word '*dhrāghīyas*' is in the comparative degree. The *Āchāryā* observes that *Ambāl*'s look or glance is more wide-ranging or long-ranging than anything else. '*Dhrusā dhrāghīyasyā*' = by means of the sidelong glance that has a very extensive reach; the sidelong glance of the elongated eyes that goes a long distance. Elongated eyes are a characteristic of noble women.

A mother would like her child to be always within her sight. She would keep looking at it whether it is in the hammock, outside the house, in the backyard or anywhere else. For *Ambāl* all creatures of the universe are her children, indeed they are all babes in arms. People who have accomplished great things, who have performed great feats, all are her infants. Just as a mother keeps her baby within her sight, *Ambāl* keeps within her sight all her infant children including animals, birds, worms and even grass. In

other words her glance extends to the borders of the universe. Where is the boundary of the universe? It seems to be endless with its galaxies, nebulae and so on, so say scientists. If this cosmos without an end is embraced by *Ambāl*'s look it means her look is also without an end in its range. It goes on and on extending endlessly and falling on all children of the Brahmanda, 'dhrāghīyasyā'.

If *Ambāl*'s glance encompasses all the world, it means it falls on all, irrespective of whether any of them deserves it or not.

This is the distinctive quality of *Ambāl*'s sidelong glance. What is its form like, the wealth constituted by that form?

'Dharadhalitha-nīlōthpala-ruchā'.

By 'ruchi' we usually mean the taste experienced by the sense organ of the mouth (or the tongue). It does have such a meaning in Sanskrit, but the word chiefly denotes light perceived by the sense organ of the eye. The phrase '*hēmāmbuja-ruchi*', used earlier (in Stanza 48) to denote *Ambāl*'s forehead eye, means that it (the eye in the forehead) has the radiance of a golden lotus. There it was '*Dharadhalitha-hēmāmbujaruchih*'. Here it is '*Dharadhalitha-nīlōthpala-ruchih*'. The third eye which glows like fire is '*hēmāmbuja*'; the other two eyes are '*nīlōthpala*'.

The word '*nīlōthpala*' sounds soft and sweet because of the two 'la-karas' in it. So too the name '*Lalithā*'. When we make an ornament we use in it gems of different sizes and different colours, small, big, green, red, and so on. In the same way, in a literary work, the words used are chosen according to how euphonious and how meaningful they are. The mark of a great poet is to employ words that are pregnant with meaning, words that are mellifluous, words with their very sound conveying a meaning.

The chief goddess of the temple in *Thiruvārūr*, in Thanjavur district, has the name '*Nīlōthpalāmbāl*'. There is also an

independent sanctum in it for *Kāmalāmbāl*. 'Kamala', as you know, is the lotus.

'*Nīlōthpala*' is *karunguvaḷai* in Tamil. 'Uthpala' by itself means the *kuvalai* flower, water-lily. With the prefix 'nīla' it means '*karunguvaḷai*' blue or black water-lily. In Sanskrit 'nīla' usually means blue; '*Krishṇa*' means black or dark. But 'nīla' itself can mean black. But here, in this stanza, the word denotes blue itself.

If the red lotus has the beauty of warm, bright, light, the *nīlōthpala* has the beauty of-a cool glow: it is indeed cool to the eye. The *nīlōthpala* sways in the wind in the lake and it is made very cool by the droplets of water on its petals. *Ambāl*'s two eyes which are moist with compassion are like the wet *nīlōthpalas*, very pleasingly cool. As *Ambāl* casts her sidelong glance across the world, it sways from one corner of the world to another. In shape each eye is like a *nīlōthpala*, the look also is blue. Apart from being long they are also blue. Besides, having the same coolness as *nīlōthpala*, they too sway from side to side. There are so many similarities between the two. 'Ruchā' = by the glow. This glow does not dazzle our eyes and is not like that of *hemambuja* which refers to the third eye. It is cool blue light that is like a salve to the eye that is dazzled.

The *Āchāryā* prays to the glance of *Ambāl*'s left and right eyes which are like blue water-lilies, not to that of the eye in the forehead which is metaphorically *hemambuja* or a golden lotus. Is not the great heat caused by *Īsvara* by opening his forehead eye known to all? Though *Ambāl* too has a similar eye, there is no account of her having ever opened it.

The *Āchāryā* uses the word '*nīlōthpala*' with an adjective, 'Dharadhalitha'. 'Dhalitha' here means blossomed, unfolded. When the moon's rays fall upon the blue water-lily bud it bursts

open; it becomes 'Dhalitha'. With the prefix 'dhara' it means 'little by little'.

A blue water-lily that is in full bloom will not be shaped like the eye. It is only when it is a bud that it will be so shaped, though not fully in the bud form. When the eye is closed, only then will it look like a blue water-lily bud. That *Ambāl* never closes her eyes has been stated so often.

Can we then say that she sees with her eyes fully open. No, no. That also cannot be right. Looking with the eyes fully open cannot reflect compassion wholly: it is in anger that the eyes are fully open. In compassion the eyes must be partly closed, partly open, and the pupil of the eye too must be partly seen and partly not seen. In *śānta* or tranquillity, the eyes will be drawn in and only a little bit will be seen. In compassion, the eyes will be half closed and half open. When *Ambāl* looks at the world in supreme compassion, her eyes, like the blue waterlily, will be a little open and a little closed: it is this that the *Āchāryā* describes as 'Dharadhalitha-nīlōthpala-ruchā'. In this state a flower's subtle beauty is seen at its best. It is a tantalising phenomenon. The flower seems to tell us: 'There is something hidden inside. It will not be revealed but, at the same time, it will not remain totally unrevealed. By revealing half the 'something' I will excite your eagerness to know the rest.' It is similar in poetry. The poet always leaves a little unsaid in his poem so as to enhance its aesthetic appeal.

As you go further and further into the inner part of the blue water lily you will find that the petals become less and less blue in colour. The same is the case with the red lotus. If you go on examining its petals, you will find that, after you come to about half of the flower, the petals will become whiter and whiter. At the root you will see that there is no redness at all. Only when it is

partly unfolded will a blue water-lily be seen to be completely blue, with the sheen of silk and looking as if it has been oiled. When it is in full bloom the whiteness of the inner petals will show. As for *Ambāl*'s eyes they are entirely blue. They will never lose their colour and become white. The qualifying word 'dara' added to 'Dhalitha' is appropriate: with that word 'Dhalitha' means a 'little unfolded'.

'*Ruchā*' = because of the glow or radiance.

The first line means: 'Your glance with its extensive reach and with its glow of a blue water-lily just unfolding...'

When we speak of '*dhūrgha-dharsanam*' we refer to one's ability to see far into the past and into the future. Here the far-sightedness is with reference to space; *Ambāl*'s glance can go far and traverse the entire universe.

The next line: '*Dhavīyāmsam dhīnam snapaya krupayā māmapi Śivē.*'

The first line is replete with '*dha-kāras*': '*dhrusā*', '*dhraghīyasyā*', '*dhara*' and '*dhalitha*'. The second line too has two '*dha-karas*': '*dhavīyamsam*' and '*dhinam*'. '*Dhraghīyasya*' and '*dhavīyāmsam*' ring alike. All this is part of verbal ornamentation, '*sābdālankara*'. But more noteworthy, indeed a thousand times more important, is the meaning conveyed by the words [*arthālankāra*], the '*bhāva*', the feeling evoked.

The *Āchāryā* addresses *Ambāl* as '*Śivē*', the embodiment of all that is auspicious.

'*Dhavīyāmsam*' means existing very far away. Like '*dhrāghīyasyā*', this word is also in the comparative degree. If *Ambāl*'s look is longer (reaches out farther) than anything else, what about the one who is more distant from her than all others? Who is it?

'*Dhīnam*': one who is in abject poverty, one who suffers much and is worthy of everyone's sympathy, one who is full of fear, good-for nothing, lowly-the word has all these meanings. The *Āchāryā* has used such a word here.

He prays for 'this *dhīna*, this poor man', who is farthest from *Ambāl*, farther than anyone else. '*Krupayā*'= with your compassion; '*snayā*' = bathe (him). 'Bathe this poor man who is full of dirt and make him pure, Mother,' so prays the *Āchāryā*.

Where is he to be bathed? '*Dhruvā*'-in *Ambāl*'s glance. 'In the ambrosia of your sidelong glance, bathe him, Mother.' A drop of that ambrosia of her sidelong glance will not be enough. The ambrosia must come flooding and bathe him, this *dhīna*.

If we examined the meaning of the first line of the stanza we would think that there is no need for such a prayer. '*Dhṛāghīyasyā*': does not *Ambāl*'s sidelong glance reach out far without being asked by anyone to be so and does it not fall on all irrespective of whether or not they deserve it? And are not all creatures of the world bathed in it? Then why should the *Āchāryā* specially pray, '*Snayā krupayā*': 'Bathe (him) in your compassion?'

Why should the *Āchāryā* pray thus? This *dhīna* is not like other creatures. He is far removed from them. Is he not '*dhavīyāmsa*' (one who is far away)? He does not seem to belong even to this world in which people who have committed great wrongs are enabled to receive *Ambāl*'s sidelong glance. It appears he has been banished from this world.

If he has been banished (or excommunicated) even by the supremely compassionate *Ambāl*, it means that he must be so evil, so full of sin. But who is he?

Now comes the word that is the very soul of this stanza, the word that eloquently expresses the sublime character of the *Āchāryā*'s compassionate heart and his humility.

'Māmapi'.

'Mām api' 'Mām' = me; 'api' = also; 'me also'.

The one who is removed furthest from *Ambāl*, the *dhīna* (the wretched and the impure and the suffering one) is not an unknown person. 'It is I myself,' says the *Āchāryā*.

Just as *Ambāl* and *Īśvara* are not separate from each other so is our *Śāṅkara Bhagavatpādhā* not separate from the two. If we just think of him all our sins will be washed away at once. He is the one who lifted up the fallen, sanctified the fallen, the one who encouraged and enthused us all who are *dhīna* and *hīna* (lowly and abandoned) by the teaching that proclaims to us the non-dualistic truth, 'You too, child, are the *Paramāthmā*.' It is such a one who, after banishing himself far from *Ambāl*, beseeches her: '*Dhaviyāmsam dhīnam snapaya krupayā māmapi, Śive*': 'Bathe me too, O Mother, in the holy water of your sidelong glance, me who is poor and lowly and inaccessibly far from you.'

Not 'bathe me' but 'bathe me too' (*'māmapi snapaya'*). The *Āchāryā* has abased himself lower than others, made himself smaller than others. 'Cast your sidelong glance on me too.' It means the *Āchāryā* is telling *Ambāl*: 'You are the embodiment of compassion and your sidelong glance reaches out to great distances. Yet you have banished me to a spot which is beyond the scope of your glance. Is it not because I do not deserve it at all, even one like me?' *Ambāl*'s glance has a long reach-- '*dhṛāghīyas*'-- and if she wills it she can extend it further. There is nothing that is beyond her. The *Āchāryā* prays in abject humility: 'Instead of your glance lingering over me too fleetingly, may it fall on me as a rain of grace. May I be bathed in it.'

The *Āchāryā* was an incarnation of *Śiva-Śākthi* and in that he was something above a king or a lord, a universal teacher, *Jagadāchāryā*. He remained always on a lofty plane in his experience of the Reality and what he accomplished in his life of 32 years was such as no other man could have accomplished and it arouses our wonder even today. In that brief life he was engaged not only in the uplift of the world but in showering his compassion on all including the *Kāpālīka* who wanted to chop off his head. Why does the *Āchāryā*, so noble and high-minded, speak thus lowering himself?

As I said in another context, the *Āchāryā* speaks words addressed to *Ambālī*, words that we ought to speak ourselves. It is indeed we who have committed great sins and are banished far beyond the empire of bliss, *Ambālī's* sidelong glance. So it is we who must pray as the *Āchāryā* does. But we do not know how to pray. So the *Āchāryā* teaches us to pray, the *Āchāryā* who does not need to pray in this manner.

They say that Jesus took upon himself the sins of all people and was nailed on the Cross. The *Āchāryā* takes upon himself all the evil that is ours and tells *Ambālī*: 'Bathe me too in the stream of your sidelong glance.' He gives us the medicine to cure us of our sins, the nectar of *Ambālī's* sidelong glance. If we pray to *Ambālī* for her sidelong glance, as taught by the *āchāryā*, she will grant it to us. She cannot but do so. For, after all, it was she who inspired the *Āchāryā* to speak thus.

Earlier, we saw that when the *Āchāryā* dealt with the nine rasas revealed in *Ambālī's* eyes, he spoke for all, for 'nah' (for 'us'), but when he came to the *karuṇā* rasa or compassion he used the word 'mayi' (in 'me'). We did not then understand why he did so. The answer is clearly indicated in this stanza. Actually, the compassionate sidelong glance falls on all; its impact is universal. So there is no need for anyone to pray for it specially. The *Āchāryā*

says in utter humility that he has been banished as a *dhīna*, as a good-for-nothing person, and that he has to ask for the Mother's compassion. It is for the same reason that he uses the word 'mayi' in the earlier stanza also.

In the tradition of *ŚrīKṛṣṇa Chaitanya*-in fact in all schools subscribing to dualism-the *naiṣya bhāva*, in which the devotee adores the Lord abasing himself, is very much extolled. The *Bhagavatpādhā* proclaimed the non-dualistic truth that the individual Self is one with the Brahman. But when he becomes a devotee he surpasses all others in his *naiṣya bhāva*. 'I am far removed from all others [lower than the lowest]. Bathe me, Mother, in your sidelong glance,' he pleads.

What would be the *Āchāryā*'s answer if *Ambāl* were to ask him, 'That is all right. You have yourself said that I keep blessing the world on my own with my sidelong glance. Even so you say that I have discarded you, banished you far, because you do not deserve my sidelong glance in the least. Then why do you pray for it?' Such a question on *Ambāl*'s part would only be a pretext to invite an ingenious reply of poetic beauty from the *Āchāryā*.

And this reply is contained in the second half of the stanza:

Anēnāyam dhanyō bhavathi na cha the hāniriyathā
Vanē vā harmyē vā samakaranipathō himakarah

'I do not deserve it, your glance, and I must not ask for it, and it is in conformity with the laws of ethics or morality. But where is the law or rule for love, for devotion, that is unalloyed? There are objects that do good to all, without consideration of merit or justice. Does not the *Gītā* teach *samadharsana*, the concept of seeing the selfsame thing in everything and everybody, and describe it as the characteristic of *jnānis*? There are so many who have *samardhasana*. I will give a specific example: Himakarah.' The *Āchāryā* invariably uses the word 'himakarah'

for the moon whenever he speaks of *Ambāl* because he showers coolness. This himakara does not think about where his light serene should fall or where it should not, whether anyone deserves it or does not. Without the least discrimination, the moon pours out his light equally on the Thanjavur gopuram as he does on the sculptures of *Māmallapuram*; he pours it out as much on the slums as on the burning grounds. '*Vanē vā harmyē vā*', whether it is the forest or the terrace of a palace he pours out his rays without making any distinction between the two. '*Samakaranipāthah*': he rains his rays equally on all. Does the moon emit his light in extra measure on the smooth and shiny marble terrace of the emperor's palace, the terrace specially built to receive moonlight? Or does he reduce his flow of light when it falls in the forest where brush and thorny shrubs grow? 'Your sidelong glance,' states the *Āchāryā* to *Ambāl*, 'must have the same character as the moon. So, though I am totally undeserving of it, could you not bathe me in the sacred water of your sidelong glance just as the moon drenches even a cactus with his rays?'

Ambāl's question of how the *Āchāryā* can pray for her kataksha without deserving it has been answered. The answer is: 'You should not mind whether one merits it or not and you must act with samadhrushti (*samardhasana*) on all.'

There is another interesting question which we could presume *Ambāl* would have put to the *Āchāryā*: 'By looking at a sinner, my sidelong glance will itself be tainted. What will I do then? When the glance falls on people who are not all right, what harm will come to it? Will it be like eye trouble that is contagious?'

The *Āchāryā*'s reply: '*Na cha the hāniriyathā*'. '*Na cha the hānih iyathā*'. 'Iyatha' = because of it; '*the*' = to you; with, '*vā*' it means 'even to you'; '*hānih na*' - (there will be) no harm.

'By looking at a great sinner like me you will come to no harm. You do not stand to lose anything and you will not be

affected by what is seen by you, by the object seen by you. If it is asked whether the subject is not affected by the object the example of the moon could be enough. If moonlight falls in the forest, is the moon pricked by the thorny shrubs in it? Do the stones there cause the moon any injury? No. When moonlight fell on the bed that is the hamsa-swing on the terrace, did the moon feel anything soft to his touch or did he experience any pleasure? If moonlight is not affected by any object whatever its nature, why should any object, because it does not deserve your *katāksha*, affect that glance of yours, affect the compassionate glance of *Chandramaulīsvarī*, that is you? Let me continue to be full of evil. How will that affect your sidelong glance?' 'Na cha thē hāniriyathā': 'no harm will come to you too.'

Why this 'to you too'? If there is a 'to you too' there must, for the purposes of symmetry, a 'for me too'. What is that?

'*Anēna ayam dhanyō bhavathi.*'

'By being bathed in the grace of your glance I too have become enriched, become blessed. That is, I have made a great gain, obtained riches,' observes the *Āchāryā*.

I have changed the order in which the *Āchāryā* makes this statement. What he says first is: 'I have become blessed, become enriched by *Ambāl's* sidelong glance.' It is afterwards that he observes: 'You will not come to any harm by it [by your sidelong glance falling on me].'

'*Anēna*' = by this (that is as mentioned in the first two lines, of being bathed in the sidelong glance); '*ayam*' = he (instead of 'I', 'he' is used; this is in keeping with the tradition of *sannyāsins* who do not refer to themselves in the first person); '*dhanyah*' = wealthy (one who has *dhana*, wealth, is '*dhanya*'). With *Ambāl's* sidelong glance one obtains the wealth of her grace and there is no greater wealth than it: '*bhavathi*' = becomes (that is 'I become').

‘By becoming the object of your sidelong glance I have been enriched. So you must cast on me too your sidelong glance, far though I am from you.’

‘All sin, all evil, vanishes in your compassionate sidelong glance. One finds fulfilment of one’s life and obtains an entire ocean of bliss. Besides, there is no harm done to you, *Ambāl*. While you do not stand to lose, I make a big gain. That lack of merit for which you kept me away from you is no longer there in me. I have obtained merit in plenty because of your sidelong glance. I, who had nothing, now possess everything. I have become rich.’

It is because the *Āchāryā* wants all of us to be rewarded with this wealth (the wealth of *Ambāl*’s grace) that he has blessed us with this *śloka*. If it is recited with all one’s heart, *Ambāl* will bless us however undeserving we be. Her sidelong glance, which is cool like moonlight and the blue water-lily, will elevate us.

We make ourselves happy by adorning ourselves in many ways. We go not only after outward adornment. Learning, status, wealth, fame: we seek all these and they too are adornments. But there is no ornament higher than that of deserving *Ambāl*’s grace. If her sidelong glance falls on us we will realise that there is no jewellery, no decoration, superior to it. It is an ornament that will bring us the realisation that all else is no ornament at all.

The *Āchāryā* concludes the stanza with a prayer to *Ambāl* to see everything as one and the same, ‘*samakara-nipāthō himakarah*’. This *samadharsana* is seeing everything as one (all as equal) or the *Adhvaita* concept that everything is the one Brahman. *Mūka* in his adoration of *Ambāl* says that this attitude is a boon we receive from *Ambāl*’s *katāksha* (*Āryā Śathakam*, 48: Part I of *Mūka*’s *Panchasathi*). It looks as if he had this stanza (47, *Saundaryalaharī*) in mind since he also speaks of the palace and the forest. While the *Āchāryā* uses the word ‘*vanam*’, *Mūka* has in its

place 'vipinam': the former has 'harmyam' while the latter has 'bhavanam'. One who has obtained *Ambāl*'s sidelong glance, says Muka, will look upon both (the forest and the mansion) as the same. Man is tormented by desire, anger and fear. The forest stands for fear and it is banished by *Ambāl*'s *katāksha*. The forest becomes the home for one who is blessed with that glance. Then friend and foe are alike to him. Which means he will no longer nurse any anger against his enemy. Then he too will not be tormented by desire and to him a small piece of broken tile and a young woman's lips will be the same. Bathing in *Ambāl*'s sidelong glance rids him of all the three impurities (desire, fear and anger) and imparts him the non-dualistic attitude of oneness with all. The *Āchāryā* too refers to the 'dhanya', the man who has obtained non-dualistic wealth.

We must think over these ideas and recite this stanza again and again and pray to *Ambāl*.

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THE NOSE-ORNAMENT AND THE FINER POINTS OF YÔGA

In the course of his *kēsādhīpādha* description of *Ambāl*, the *Āchāryā* devotes a number of stanzas to her eyes and now (in Stanza 61) he speaks of her nose. In this he briefly touches upon some finer points of the science of *yôga*.

Ambāl's smooth nose, with its nostrils, looks like a stem of bamboo with its naturally formed holes and is adorned by a pearl stud and a pendant. '*Mukthāmanidhara*': the *Āchāryā* specifically refers to the pearl stud. In Madurai and Kanyākumari the diamond nose-studs are special to the deities. The *Sahasranāmam* has this name of *Ambāl*: '*Thārākānthithiraskāri-nāsābharaṇa-bhāsūrā*': It means that the goddess excels the stars in lustre because of the radiance of her nose ornament. From the fact that the stars

twinkle, giving the appearance of having many colours, the inference is that the nose ornament referred to is made of diamonds. Pearls do not shine with many colours. But, customarily, a nose-stud is called a stud of pearls even if it is made of precious stones. It is believed that the pearl nose-stud is particularly auspicious. We know that it was very much in fashion once upon a time.

Śrī Krishṇa Paramāthmā is a perfect embodiment of male and female beauty combined. So he wore a nose-pendant. The verse everybody knows and which begins with the phrase, '*Kasthūri-thilakam*' contains these words: '*nāsāgrē nava-maukthikam*': it means *Krishṇa* wears a new pearl as a nose-ornament.

That the *Āchāryā* speaks of a pearl ornament for *Ambālī*'s nose enhances the appropriateness of the comparison he has made of it with the bamboo stem. It is believed that pearls are found in a bamboo belonging to a high strain. Apart from oysters and bamboo, the elephant's forehead and sugarcane also, it is said, sometimes contain pearls. In the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 74) it is said that *Paramēśvarā*, after slaying *Gajāśura*, split open his forehead and made a necklace for *Ambālī* with the pearls found in it. Basing himself on the traditional belief that bamboo yields pearls, the *Āchāryā* says in the present stanza that it is appropriate that *Ambālī*'s nose which is smooth like a stem of bamboo should have a pearl stud.

In the case of the bamboo, the pearl is inside it, but in the case of *Ambālī* the pearl stud (or pendant) is on the outside of her nose. This detracts from the appropriateness of the simile. Not so, argues the *Āchāryā*. Through the stem of the bamboo that is *Ambālī*'s nose comes her divine breath. Ordinarily, if breath is exhaled through the hole in a bamboo, music is produced, the music of the flute. What happens here, when *Ambālī* breathes? Her

breath sweeps down the pearl which lodges itself outside of her nose as an ornament for it.

The *Vēdhās* are the breath of the Supreme Being (the Supreme Goddess). It is said as word play, or as a near pun, that 'mukhta' is pearl and 'mukhti' is liberation. The idea expressed here is that from the breath constituted by the *Vēdhās* emerged the mukhta that leads to mukhti or liberation.

There is another example of verbal play, in fact a pun, in the stanza. 'Vamśam' means bamboo. There is a hymn in which we adore Vēṇugōpala, *Krishṇa*, as '*Vamśī-vibhushitha ...*' '*Vamśam*' also means lineage. The *Āchāryā* who begins by saying that *Ambāl*'s nose resembles a stem of bamboo calls her 'the flag of fame of the lineage of the mountain of snow' : '*asau nāsāvamśasthuhinagirivamśa-dhvajapathi*'.

Let me speak about the yōgic implications of the stanza. When the *Āchāryā* says that the pearl inside *Ambāl*'s nose is brought out by her breath, he mentions that it is the breath exhaled through the left nostril. However, there is no word used to indicate 'left'. The *Āchāryā* says: '*Śīśirakara-niśvāsa-galitham*'. '*Niśvāsa*' is the breath exhaled; the breath inhaled is 'ucchvasa'. 'Galitham' is used to denote that something is expelled. '*Śīśira-kara*': what does the word mean? Nowhere is it mentioned that it means 'left'. '*Śīśira*' means cold (snow): 'hima' also means the same. So '*śīśira-kara*' means the same as 'himakara' which is the *āchāryā*'s favourite word for the moon with reference to *Ambāl*. He explains that it is because of the 'exhalation of the moon' that the pearl is expelled. What kind of riddle is it?

The science of yōga is indeed a riddle. According to it, when the mind is subject to the pulls of desire, anger and other urges or emotions, the breath goes in through the left nostril, and goes out through the right. But when the mind is tranquil and absorbed in

noble thoughts it is the reverse: the inhalation is through the right nostril and the exhalation through the left. When we transcend the mind in a state of *samādhi* there will be no breathing: the breath will be retained in the state of *kumbhaka*. Then there is nothing to do, no activity. *Ambāl* is the *Kāryabrahmam*, the *Brahmam* of action. She is all the time steeped in the exalted thoughts of compassion. So she inhales through the right nostril and exhales through the left.

‘But, the question is why does the *Āchāryā* speak of ‘*śīśirakara-niśvāsam*’?’

This subject is part of the science of yoga. The *nādi* on the right side through which the breath passes is called *Pingala* or *Sūryanādi* (*Sun-nādi*); and the *nādi* on the left through which the breath passes is *Idā* or *Chandranādi* (*Moon-nādi*). The middle *nādi* is *Sushumna*, *Agninādi* (*Fire nādi*). The *jīvāthmā* (the individual Self) is indeed the *Paramāthmā*: the *Paramāthmā*’s left eye is the moon, right eye the sun and the middle eye fire. The left-hand breathing tube being named after the moon, the *Āchāryā* calls it ‘*śīśirakara*’. All this has been dealt with in the ‘*Ānandalahari*’ section of the hymn and this section being devoted to a description of *Ambāl*’s beauty the *Āchāryā* does not elaborate on it (the science of *yōga*). Even so, without dealing with the subject at length, he expresses the whole idea in one word in a way that would delight people of learning.

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THE INCOMPARABLE BEAUTY OF AMBĀL’S LIPS

In the head-to-foot portrayal of *Ambāl*, after her nose comes her mouth. The *Āchāryā* first describes the lips of the goddess (Stanza 62). Usually cherry lips are compared to corals. But the redness of coral is no redness at all compared to *Ambāl*’s lips. Here the *Āchāryā* has composed his verse incorporating an idea based

on the general belief that coral is a creeper. Creepers are generally green in colour and the fruit ripening on them are usually red. If the creeper itself were to be red how red should be its fruit? Could that then be likened to *Ambāl*'s lips? No, that also is not possible. The reason is there is nothing called a coral fruit, says the *Āchāryā*, as if worried. Actually, coral is the bone of an aquatic creature belonging to the octopus [polyp] family. How can it bear fruit? Lips are likened to the bimba fruit also. Bimba also means 'prathibimba' (reflected image). That is how the bimba fruit got its name. *Ambāl*'s lips indeed are the original bimba. Once, playfully, she made the image of her red lips fall on the shiny rind of the bimba fruit and made it red: that is how it also got the name of bimba. However, it does not have redness to the same degree as the lips of the goddess. It tried to become red like her lips.

The *Āchāryā* uses the word '*adhyārōdhum*' here which means exerting oneself more than one's strength permits. Then the bimba fruit realised that it was madness to try and acquire the same redness as *Ambāl*'s lips, that it was indeed impossible. In shame it gave up its effort. 'Kathamiva na vilajjētha?' asks the *Āchāryā*. 'How can it not be ashamed of itself?' Redness is imparted by shyness also [the cheeks become flushed]. We hear that so and so 'blushed in shyness'. Thus feeling sense of shame, feeling shy about its attempt to become more red, the bimba fruit did indeed acquire an extra shade of red, but even so the colour could not match the redness of *Ambāl*'s lips. To compare the original redness of *Ambāl*'s lips with the redness of the bimba fruit (which is but their reflection) is as absurd as saying that the mother resembles her child.

The lips of *Ambāl* are incomparable in their beauty.

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THE SMILE THAT 'SOURS' MOONLIGHT

After speaking about *Ambāl's* lips, the *Āchāryā* goes on to describe the beauty of her smile and the stanza in which he does so (63) itself brims with poetic beauty.

Smithajyōthsnājālam thava Vadhanachandrasya pibathām
Chakōrānām asīdhathirasathayā chanchu jadimā
Athasthē Śīthāmsōh amruthala harīm amlaruchayah
Pibanthi svacchandam nisi nisi bhruṣam kāñjikadhiyā

As he begins to describe the beauty of *Ambāl* [Ślōka 42], the *Āchāryā* refers to her as '*Chandramauliśvarī*.' In that stanza the reference is to the moon set on the crown adorning *Ambāl's* head. Here the face itself is the moon: 'thava Vadhanachandra', 'your mukhamathi' or 'your mathimukham' ['mukha' is face; 'mathi' is the moon]. 'Mukha' denotes both the face and the mouth; 'Vadhana' also can be taken to mean both, the face and the mouth. 'Vadh' is the root of the word which means to speak. In 'Sathyam Vadha', 'Vadha' means speak. So we could say that the primary meaning of 'Vadhana' is the mouth. In the descending order of description of *Ambāl* (keśādhīpādha), after the nose comes the mouth. After describing the nose, the lips, and that which is covered by the lips, the mouth - 'Vadhana.' However, 'Vadhana' here means the face.

From the face that is the moon emanates moonlight. On the face of the real moon there is a dark spot but on *Ambāl's* face there are the two rows of bright, white, teeth. Their glitter is revealed as she smiles. Poets say that a woman's glance is like black bees darting and that her smile or laughter is like a bubbling stream of white. The *Āchāryā* speaks similarly of *Ambāl's* smile: '*Smithajyōthsnājālam thava Vadhanachandrasya*.' 'Thava Vadhanachandrasya': of your face of the moon; 'smitha' = the smile that is; 'jyōthsna' = moonlight; 'jālam' = spread. 'The moonlight of your

face of the moon that spreads in the form of your smile. That moonlight....'

What was done to the moonlight. And by whom?

There is a bird called '*chakōra*'. It is believed to sustain itself on moonlight. The moon exudes nectar; that nectar is its rays. That the *chakōra* sustains itself on moonlight is part of the poetic tradition. It seems these birds imbibe the moonlight that is *Ambāl*'s smile: '*Pibatham chakōrānām*' = of the *chakora* birds that are imbibing...

What happened to the birds?

'*Athirasathayā chanchu jadimā āsīth.*'

What is this '*Athirasam*'?

'*Athirasa*' means excessive *rasa*. The *Āchāryā* refers to *Ambāl*'s smile that is moonlight being excessively sweet. By taking in this moonlight that is excessively sweet, the beaks of the *chakōras* were benumbed. Birds take their food with their beaks. After taking in *Ambāl*'s smile that is moonlight, the beaks of the *chakoras* became insensitive. '*Athirasathayā*' = because of excessive sweetness; '*chakōrānām*' = of the *chakōras*; '*chanchu*' = beak(s); '*jadimā āsīth*' = were benumbed.

What would the birds do now? How would they make their benumbed beaks normal again and regain their sense of taste? Having tasted the gentle smile of *Jnānāmbika* (the goddess of *jnāna*) they became wise and intelligent and found a way to deal with their problem.

Can we keep eating sweet rice all the time? If we have too much of it, we will find it cloying and lose our appetite. We will then feel we must have something different to eat so as to regain our appetite for sweets. That is the reason why we make both sweet and savoury items of food. But sour or acid food is a better

remedy than salt for a benumbed mouth or tongue. This fact was known to the *chakōra* birds. That is why, after their beaks had been benumbed by taking in the sweetest of delicacies known to the world, that is the nectar of the gentle smile of *Ambāl*, they went in search of sourish gruel. Even when our tongue loses its sense of thaste because of fever or some other illness we yearn for sour food. 'I don't want gruel with milk. I want my gruel with buttermilk, ' so we tell. The leaf of a lime tree, or its smell, we find particularly pleasing then. It is thus that the *chakōras* went in search of sour gruel.

'Athah' = so, because their beaks had become insensitive; 'thē' - they, the *chakōra* birds; 'amlaruchayah' = for the sake of tasting sour items...

What did they do?.

The moon was raining his nectarine rays. '*Śīthāmsōh amruthāla harim*': '*śīthāmsōh*': of the moon whose rays are cool; 'amrutha-laharīm' = nectarine flow, that is moonlight.

Ambāl had given the *chakōra* birds the ability to take in moonlight for their sustenance. One wonders whether it was to show how the moonlight of her smile excelled the (real) moonlight. The *chakōras* tasted the nectarine rays of the moon. What happened then? We think that there is nothing more delectable than amrutha, or nectar. However it be, the birds got what they had wanted: moonlight which is amrutha tasted to them like sour gruel.. 'At last we have found a remedy for our benumbed beaks,' they said to themselves. 'After having found the moonlight of *Ambāl*'s smile cloying because of having too much of it we have found a remedy for our benumbed beaks. This remedy is the sour gruel that is the light of the moon shining in the sky.' Happy thus that they had found a solution for their problem, the birds partook of moonlight every night. '*Śīthāmsōh amruthālaharīm*': the flood

of nectar that the rays of the moon are; '*kanjikadhiyā*' knowing it to be sour gruel; '*nīsī nīsī*' = every night; '*svacchandam*' - to their hearts' content; '*bhrusam*' = plentiful; '*pibanthi*' = drink, imbibe.

'Knowing it to be gruel': the *Āchāryā* expresses the same with the words, '*kānjikadhiya*.' The *Āchāryā*'s incarnation took place in the Malayalam land where *kanji* is popular.

The *Āchāryā* has gifted us beautiful poetry in which he says that even the nectar that is moonlight is sour by comparison with the sweetness of *Ambāl*'s gentle smile: and this idea he conveys by speaking about the experience of the chakora birds. These birds are customarily given a high place since they imbibe the nectar of moonlight. The *Āchāryā* has the distinction of using his poetic imagination to turn customary ideas into novel images. He seems to speak about it thus : 'There is no need to speak in praise of chakōras as the only birds that are sustained on amrutha. They have a distinction greater than this. They take in nourishment that by comparison makes the amrutha no better than sour gruel, that nourishment being the great amrutha of the gentle smile of the Supreme Goddess. It is for a change that they take in a third-rate or fourth-rate food, that is the nectar of moonlight.' The *Āchāryā* thus puts forward a novel idea.

The celestials, in spite of partaking of amrutha, perish during the great dissolution (*mahāsamhāra*). But *Īśvara* remains. This was stated in the first part; the reason for the same was also mentioned. *Ambāl* who is the embodiment of the ambrosia of consciousness, *chaithānyamrutha*, is superior to the gross ambrosia gotten from the churning of the ocean of milk. It is because *Īśvara* is always with *Ambāl* that he never perishes. We see here that the amrutha of the gentle smile of the moon that is *Ambāl*'s face is far more delectable than the amrutha of the actual moon arising from the ocean of milk. *Ambāl* is *chaithānyamrutha*, the ambrosia of consciousness, and she is also at once *saundaryamrutha*, the

ambrosia of beauty- and it is the same that has become her face and the gentle smile revealed by it. Earlier the *Āchāryā* spoke of 'Vadhana-saundaryalaharī' (the flow of beauty of the face). Here he speaks of 'Vadhanachandra' (the face that is the moon) and states that the 'amruthālaharī' (the nectarine flow) of the moon has been turned sour by it (that is by the Vadhanachandra). We perceive moonlight with our eyes. So it would have been enough if the *Āchāryā* had said that *Ambāl*'s smile is more beautiful than it (i.e. moonlight). But he brings in the chakora birds and makes moonlight a 'commodity', the smile of *Ambāl* being sweeter than it. Taking these ideas together we find that the chaithanyalahari has become the *Saundaryalaharī* which is not only 'palatable' to the eyes [very pleasing] but also extremely sweet to the tongue. In essence this consciousness, this beauty, this sweetness, are *Ambāl*'s supreme love. All of us must become little chakora birds and partake of that divine elixir of love, that moonlight of love.

Although we cannot take in moonlight as do the chakōras, we have moonlight dinners during full moon nights. Then the moonlight fills the atmosphere and makes it cool and pleasant. 'Himakara' (one who makes things cold or cool) is also 'hithakara' (one who does what is beneficial for us). The full moon gives delight to all, happiness and pleasure. Ajnana or nescience is darkness and *jnāna* is light. We speak of *jnāna-surya* (the sun that dispels darkness and nescience). But the heat of the sun is not pleasant. As for the moon, not only does he dispel darkness, he is also hitha, does us good. In the same way, *Jnānāmbikā*, the goddess of *jnāna*, remains hitha and frees us from nescience. According to the 'Purushasūktha', the moon is born of the mind of the *Paramāthmā*. How cool and beneficent that mind should be. *Ambāl* who is so benign is connected with the moon in many ways. She herself dwells in the *mandalā* of the moon, the lunar circle. The *Sahasranāmam* has this name: '*Chandra-mandala-madhyagā*.' Her thithi (lunar day) is Pūrṇimā, the full moon. It is on this day

that special *pūjā* is performed to her. She wears the crescent moon on her head. Inside the head of the *yōgi* she herself becomes the full moon raining nectar. For ignorant people like us too the *Āchāryā* has given her gentle smile in the form of her moonlight. Let us become little *chakōras*, think of her gentle smile again and again and take in the ambrosia of her compassion flowing from it.

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THĀMBŪLA PRASĀDA

It is one's white teeth that make one's smile bright. After mentioning this idea, the *Āchāryā* adds that the white-complexioned *Sarasvathī* [who is seated on the tip of *Ambālī*'s tongue] turns red in the redness of *Ambālī*'s tongue (Stanza 64). The next stanza refers to the remains of the *thāmbūla* taken by *Ambālī* which are both red and white. The tongue, the teeth, and the lips are used in chewing *thāmbūla*.

'All right. *Thāmbūla* makes the mouth red. Where does the white come in?'

The *Āchāryā* observes (stanza 65) that the white flakes of the camphor (in the *thāmbūla*) looks like the moon pulverised: '*śaṣi-viśādha karpūraśakalā*.' The *Āchāryā* himself says so, that is why I too spoke about the white in the *thāmbūla* remains. 'How is it that I have spoken only of the white *Sarasvathī* dwelling on the tip of *Ambālī*'s tongue becoming red? While writing commentaries and composing hymns, I keep chanting the name of *Śāradā* [*Sarasvathī*] and adoring her. So to elevate her further I must speak of the redness of the betels (after chewing) on the tip of *Ambālī*'s tongue getting mixed with the whiteness of *Sarasvathī*,' so the *Āchāryā* must have thought to himself.

A 'mouth full of betels' is one of the characteristics of a *sumangali*. In the *Sahasranāmam*, the goddess is called '*Thāmbūla*-

pūriṭha-mukhī.' This is how we must visualise *Ambāl* with our mind's eye.

There is no *prasāda* superior to the remains of the betels chewed by *Ambāl*. What have come into contact with the mouth, spittle and so on, cause disgust only in the case of us mortals who are constituted of flesh and blood. *Ambāl* is the embodiment of the letters of the alphabet 'a' to 'ksha'. She is also manthra personified. Above all, she is the embodiment of love and is indeed made of love and made for love. So the remnants of the betels chewed by her are to be treated as a sacred substance.

Who receives the remnants of the betels? Not some great devotee of this world, some seer or poet, according to the *Āchāryā*. He creates scene showing the *prasāda* being received by *Ambāl*'s beloved son *Kumāraswami* (Subrahmaṇya), Indra who had received instruction in Brahmanidhya from her and *Mahāviṣṇu*, who is to be identified as herself in male form.

In the *Gītā*, *Krishṇa Paramāthmā* mentions *Kumārāswāmī* [Skanda] as the ideal commander-in-chief. His spear is called *Śakti* and it is indeed *Parāśakti* in the form of a weapon. And with this weapon he performs great feats, achieves great victories. Since, as the chief of the celestial army, he went to war in the cause of the *dēvas*, Indra tagged on to him during these campaigns. *Mahāviṣṇu* has the name of Upendra, one who 'adheres' to Indra. How did he get the name? During his incarnation as *Vāmana* he was born to Adhithi and *Kāśyapa*, Indra's parents, hence the name of Upendra [since he came after Indra]. The *Āchāryā* uses that name here: '*Viśākha-Indrōpendra*': 'Visakha, Indra, Upendra.' Once, after taking part in a war between the celestials and the asuras and emerging victorious in it, *Kumāraswāmī* returned home that is the home of *Śiva* and *Śakti*-with his companions, Indra and Upendra. They had one purpose: to have *Ambāl*'s *ucchishta prasāda* (the remnants of her betels as *prasāda*).

Before the incarnation of *Kumāraswāmi*, the celestials had once won a victory in war over the asuras. They were then proud that it was because of their own prowess that they had achieved success. *Parāśakthi*, who is the source of all *Śakthi*, reduced them to such a lamentable state as that of grass and they found themselves unable to move even the flimsiest of objects. Wisdom then dawned on Indra first who was also the first to learn to be humble. And *Ambāl* out of compassion taught him *Brahmavidhya* and brought him the realisation that the *Brahmasakthi* is the source of all strength: that is the one plenary *sakthi* divides itself into parts to become the support of various objects (or *Sakthis*). This story occurs in the *Kēnōpanishad*.

Visakha (*Kumāraswāmi* or *Subrahmaṇya*), Indra and *Upēndra* knew that it was due to *Ambāl*'s grace, her *prasāda*, that they had become victorious. They wished to offer the laurels of their victory at her feet and they came rushing to pay their obeisance to her and also receive her *prasāda* in the form of the remains of her thambula.

Ambāl feeds others and she never thinks of taking food herself. She accepts the *naivedya*, the offerings made to her by her devotees, by her children. But it is for their satisfaction and for them to partake of them later as her *prasāda*. She does not need to take any food in her own home. It is enough for her to take betels.. And that is what she does. [The Gurudeva continues with a smile...] When you chew betels your appetite is reduced.

In her home it is for *Swāmī* (*Paramēśvarā*) that there is plenty of food, *nivēdhanam* and so on. The idea is that at least then he will not go roaming with his begging bowl. Now, when *Subrahmaṇyaswāmī*, *Mahāvishṇu* and Indra are back (from the battlefield), *Śiva* has already had his meal and there is much *prasāda* left. But the three do not touch it. They run after the remnants of Mother's thāmbūla, preferring them to what is left-

over from Father's food. For this the *Āchāryā* gives a subtle reason: '*Chandāmsa nirmālya-vimukhaih*,' 'averse to *Chandikēśvarā*'s share of the *prasāda*.' What is the reference here? *Chandikēśvarā* has the first right to the left-over from what is offered to *Paramēśvarā*. What is left over from the offerings made to *Śiva* must be made over as an oblation to *Chandikēśvarā*; only then can others receive it. We regard all this as our great good fortune. *Chandikesvara* was born like us on earth, as a mortal, but because of his devotion became the fifth member of *Paramēśvarā*'s family-*Paramēśvarā*, *Ambāl*, *Gaṇapathi*, *Subrahmaṇya*, *Chandikēśvarā*. In temple festivals [in the South] these five deities that are taken out in procession. We accept as specially sacred the left-over from *Śiva*'s offerings as that of that god's *prasāda* as well as that of *Chandikesvara*. However, *Śiva*'s son (*Subrahmanya*), the one (that is *Vishṇu*) who, like *Ambāl*, has obtained half the body of *Śiva* and the king of the celestials (*Indra*) do not feel happy about receiving what is left - over from the food partaken of by one who rose to the position of an immortal (*deva*) from that of a mortal. This is referred to by the words '*Chandāmsa-vimukhaih*.' The three were averse to the idea of sharing the left-over of the offerings made to *Śiva*. '*Vimukhaih*' means they turned their face away from the leftover.

'With the grace of our Mother we have won victory over the asuras. This victory was a gift to us from her; it was charity received from her. We must prostrate ourselves before her as an act of thanksgiving and receive her *prasāda*,' so the three say to themselves and rush to her place. As they do so they make this resolve: 'We must go to her place as beggars, as her children, and fall at her feet. We must not approach her wearing our uniforms, displaying our valour or with the swagger of generals.' So they go to see *Ambāl* after casting away their headgear. Even when people go to catch a thief they wear a turban as a protection against blows

aimed at the head. Policemen and soldiers wear caps, helmets, and so on according to their rank. But when approaching great people or elders the upper cloth (*angavastra*), the turban, etc., must not be worn. It is in this way that the three, *Subrahmaṇya*, *Vishṇu* and *Indra*, remove their headgear. '*Apahrutha śirasthraiḥ*'; '*śirasthra*' means a helmet, that which protects the head; '*apahrutha*' means discarded. *Ambāl*'s pet son, beloved *sahōdhara* (brother) and dear disciple approach her. The *Āchāryā* uses the word '*sahōdhara*', brother, for *Vishṇu* because to use any word meaning 'elder brother' [which he is] would not be appropriate in the context.

While paying obeisance to great people, to a king, to men occupying high positions, it is proper to remove one's headgear. But earlier in the hymn we saw that the deities who prostrated themselves at the feet of *Ambāl* were wearing their crowns. In fact, those glittering crowns served the purpose of the *nīrājana* performed to *Ambāl*. When *Ambāl* went to receive her husband *Siva*, she was about to trip on the crowns of *Brahma*, *Vishṇu*, *Indra* and others, so it was said. How do we reconcile what was mentioned in the earlier stanzas with the present statement about the headgear worn by *Subrahmanya*, *Vishṇu* and *Indra*? We must take it that, urged by their devotion, the deities mentioned in the earlier stanzas failed to observe 'protocol' and fell at the feet of *Ambāl* like trees uprooted. If the three gods mentioned in the present stanza have removed their headgear, as they pay obeisance to *Ambāl*, it is because they have acted according to what is dictated by worldly custom.

The *Āchāryā* who says that the three removed their helmets mentions specifically that they did not divest themselves of their armour. '*Apahrutha śirasthraiḥ kavachibhiḥ*' - they were wearing their armour. Strictly speaking they must remove their armour also. When you come to see me don't you remove your shirts? The armour is a kind of shirt. Then why did the three gods not remove

the armour they were wearing considering that they took care to discard their helmets?

One reason occurs to me. Whether it is helmet, crown or turban, it is easily removed: it can just be lifted up and kept aside. When Subrahmanya, *Vishṇu* and Indra come running to see *Ambāl* it is not difficult for them to remove their helmets. But it is different with the armour. The armour is fixed to the body with buttons, screws, straps and so on and it cannot be easily removed, and demands patience. The three great gods who are anxious to see *Ambāl* do not have such patience. They are like children excited by the prospect of seeing their Mother. And they are eager to tell her about their victory in the war with the asuras. That is why they come to her with their armour.

With great love, as an act of blessing, *Ambāl* gives them the remains of her betels. *Thāmbūla* is highly auspicious. What to say of the *thāmbūla* of *Ambāl*, the Supreme Goddess?

One more point. *Thāmbūla* signifies victory also. It is *merely* leaf, the betel creeper yielding neither flower nor fruit. Is it not right for *Ambāl* to give her betel *prasāda* to the victorious heroes? It is also a blessing that will ensure their victory in their further exploits.

The *Āchāryā*, however, does not ascribe any such virtue to the remnants of *Ambāl*'s betels. He merely says: 'Mother, the remnants of your betels are being swallowed, mouthful after mouthful, by *Visākha*, Indra and *Upendra*.'

Why has the *Āchāryā* not mentioned the benefits (the fruits) yielded by the *prasāda*? It is because it is not possible to enumerate all of them.

The benefit generally mentioned of taking *Ambāl*'s *thāmbūla prasāda* is poetic genius. *Kālidāsa*, *Kālamēgha Puṣavar* and *Mūka* partook of this *prasāda* of the *Mahākālī* of Ujjayini,

Akhiāndēsvārī of *Jambukēśvaram* [near Thiruchi] and the *Kāmākshi* of *Kānchī* - in that order-and that is why they became great poets. In the hymn *Ambāshtaka*, composed by him, the *Āchāryā* says that by taking the remains of *Ambālī*'s betels one would be blessed with the gift of composing poetry that gallops like a high-bred steed.

In the *Saundaryalaharī*, however, the *Āchāryā* says in one place (Stanza 75) that it is the milk of *Ambālī*'s breast that gives one the poetic muse and in another place (Stanza 98) he says that it is the sacred water of her feet that gives the same blessing. There is no mention of the remnants of her betels conferring poetic genius.

When he speaks about the water sanctified by *Ambālī*'s feet, the *Āchāryā* observes that it gives the same gift of poetry as that given by the remnants of *Sarasvathī*'s betels: '*Vānī-mukha-Kamala-thāmbūlam*.' This sacred water is red in colour because of the lac smeared on *Ambālī*'s feet and it resembles in colour the juice of betels. '*Kalithālaktakarasaṃ*': water mixed with shellac; the word 'lac' is derived from 'laktakam' or 'laksha.'

The *Āchāryā* asks in all humility: 'When will I, a vidhyarthi, obtain that sacred water of your feet?' '*Vidhyārthī*' means student, one who desires to acquire vidhya, learning. The *Āchāryā* was guru to the whole world and he was a master of both Brahma-vidhya and *Śrīvidhya* and yet he calls himself a mere pupil. When he says that people who are born deaf pour out poetry as a blessing conferred on them by the sacred water of *Ambālī*'s feet, he must have, it seems, foreseen the birth of the poet Muka.

He asks movingly: 'When will I drink that water sanctified by your (*Ambālī*'s) feet?' '*Kadhā kālē pibēyam?*'

Altogether there is no mention here that the juice of the betels chewed by *Ambālī* makes one a poet. If it were so mentioned the question would arise: 'What poetry has Subrahmanya, *Vishṇu*

and Indra composed?’ So the *Thāmbūla* rasa of *Ambāl* [the juice of the betels chewed by her] must be regarded as part of the reception accorded to war heroes. It gives them the strength to achieve victories in future and it also brings them *jnāna*. Or we must take it that the *Āchāryā* does not mention the blessing derived from taking the remnants of *Ambāl*’s betels since they are too many to be enumerated.

* * *

THE PRAISE THAT SHAMES

*Vipanchyā gāyanthī vividham apadhānam Paśupathēh
Thvayārabdhē vakthum chalithasirasā sādhuвачanē
Tadhīyair mādhyair apala pitha thanthrikalaravām
Nijām vīṇām Vānī nichulayathī chōlēna nibhrutham*

In this stanza (66), the *Āchāryā* paints a picture that has the character of a dramatic scene. A drama is staged before an assembly and this dramatic scene is enacted before the court of *Ambāl*.

Ambāl is listening to a music recital and finds delight in it. When you are in a joyous mood you feel like listening to music. When you are burdened with work or are worried about something you do not feel like listening to a music performance. To meditate on *Ambāl* as an embodiment of joy [listening happily to music] is to bring us a sense of tranquillity.

Ambāl is listening to *Sarasvathī*. *Sarasvathī* is playing the *vīṇa* and singing at the same time. The one with whose grace music and literature are created, she, *Sarasvathī*, is herself singing literary pieces set to music and playing the *vīṇa* at the same time. If the presiding deity of music herself sings, and plays the *vīṇa*, can we imagine how sweet the music would be, the emotions evoked by the song sung?

'*Vipanchyā*' means on the *vipanchi*. '*Vipanchi*' means a *vīṇa* which is also called '*Parivādhini*.' *Sarasvathī*'s *vīṇa* has a name of its own, '*Kacchapī*.' The weapons, musical instruments and so on associated with gods and goddesses or with great men have names of their own. The bow of *Īśvara* is '*Pināka*'; hence he is '*Pinākapāṇi*.' *Mahāviṣṇu*'s bow is '*Sārṅga*', so he is '*Sārṅgapāṇi*.' Arjuna's bow is '*Gandhīva*'. When we come to the *vīṇā*, we see that Narada has in his hand the *vīṇa* called '*Mahathī*.' The names of Narada and Tumburu are usually clubbed together. Tumburu's *vīṇā* is '*Kalāvathī*.' *Kacchapi* means a tortoise. The *Kacchapi vīṇā*'s resonating bowl is shaped like a tortoise, hence the name. It is learnt that even today this type of *vīṇā* is found in the Philippines; it is called there '*katjapi*.' In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs the name '*Nija-sallāpa-mādhurya-vinir-bharthsitha-kacchapi*.' It is the idea contained in this that the *Āchāryā* has developed into a dramatic scene. But, instead of using the term '*Kacchapi*', he gives the common name of the *vīṇā*, '*vipanchi*.'

'*Vipanchyā gāyanthī*' means playing the *vīṇa*, creating music by playing the *vīṇā*: this is the literal meaning. I interpret the words to mean, 'playing the *vīṇā* and at the same time singing.' I say this on the basis of the following words in the stanza: '*vividham apadhānam Paṣupathēh*.' '*Paṣupathēh* = *Paramēśvara*'s, '*vividham*' = different, various; '*apadhānam*' = stories of a sublime character. So, altogether, the words mean *Sarasvathī* plays on the *vīṇa* accounts of *Śiva*'s noble character set to music. The sport [or exploits of a god or anyone for that matter] can be described only through words. When the story of *Īśvara*'s sport is set to music, its beauty must be combined with the literary charm of the narration. And the story will be understood only if it is rendered vocally. That is why I say that *Sarasvathī* also sang as she played the *vīṇa*.

All of us feel elated when we are praised. But, actually, people praise us either out of ignorance or because they have some

ulterior motive, like getting something out of us. If there is nothing in us that makes us worthy of being praised, what about *Ambāl*? No one can sing her glory fully because it has no limits.

But does *Sarasvathī* sing *Ambāl*'s fame or her sport as she plays the *vīṇā*? No. It is the story and the praise of *Paramēśvarā* that she sings. This is what the Supreme Goddess, *Ambāl*, likes, *Ambāl* who is a gem among *pathivrathās*. *Sarasvathī* knows *Ambāl*'s mind; she is called 'sarvajna.' Those like the *Āchāryā* who ascended the sarvajna-pīṭa, the seat of omniscience, did so after answering all her questions, after conquering her [in learned debate] and receiving her blessings. The glory of *Paramēśvarā* is as boundless as *Ambāl*'s. *Sarasvathī* sings his glory (as far as she knows it) playing the *vīṇā* at the same time.

When musicians perform before an assembly of the rich or of powerful people, they sing according to their likes and dislikes (they sing or play an instrument in such a manner as to receive the maximum reward from those before whom they perform). *Sarasvathī* too knows how to please the one before whom she sings and plays the *vīṇā*. If she were to play the *vīṇā* in the presence of *Īśvara* she would sing *Ambāl*'s glory for that is what would please him. Now before *Ambāl* she sings the glory of *Paramēśvarā* so as to make *Ambāl* happy.

The performance is taking place in the presence of *Ambāl*. The one who sings is *Sarasvathī*. And it is not only a recital of vocal music but also a *vīṇā* recital: indeed the *vīṇā* is *Kacchapi* which is famed for its sweet strains. And, altogether, there is a shower of nectarine music. The theme of the music is the sport of *Īśvarā*. Thus everything about the recital is sublime in character.

At the beginning of his *Śivānandalaharī* the *Āchāryā* says that the *Śivānanda*, the bliss of *Śiva*, flowing from the story of *Paramēśvarā* fills the lake of his consciousness. It is in such *Śivānanda* that *Ambāl* is now immersed. Even to read accounts of

Śiva's sport is to obtain bliss. What then if we listen to these accounts set to tune by *Sarasvathī* and sung by herself?

Ambāl is absorbed in it and steeped in the joy of listening to the music, to the accounts of *Śiva's* sport, and now and then shaking her head [in appreciation of *Sarasvathī's* recital] - '*chalitha śirasā*', by shaking her head.

Applause expressed by the clapping of hands is '*karahkampa*'; shaking the head in appreciation of something is '*sirahkampa*.' There is not much delicacy in the former and *Ambāl* shows her appreciation only by her *sirahkampa*.

The musician feels encouraged when listeners show their appreciation of his performance. The good points in a recital must be noted and the fact that we take delight in the performance must be made known to the artist at once. Even if a musician does not sing well, we must give him encouragement so that he might come out with one or two good aspects.

Appreciation must be whole-hearted. We must not sit through a performance putting on a long face, nor must we adopt a superior air while listening to it. Also we must not assume that we alone are conversant with the art and keep pointing out faults in the performance. When the musician discovers that the listener is out to find fault with his singing [or playing an instrument] he will become nervous and his imagination will suffer. Such is the case not only with music but also with writing, learning, and sports.

Sarasvathī gives an amazingly great performance and *Ambāl* listens to it with delight and keeps encouraging her.

What I have told you so far relates to the first line of the stanza: '*vipanchyā gayanthi vividham apadhānam Pasupathēh*': '*as Sarasvathī* sings the song containing the many different accounts of *Paramēśvarā's* sport, and plays the *vīṇā* at the same time...' The

name of *Sarasvathī* does not occur in the line; it does in the fourth line as 'Vāñi.' What after that?

'*Thvayārabdhē vakthum chalithasīrasā sādhuвачanē*': '*chalithasīrasā*' = shaking her head - '*Thvayā*' = by you (by *Ambikā*, since the *Āchāryā* is addressing her); '*sādhuвачanam*' = words of appreciation, congratulation; '*vakthum ārabdhē*' = as (she) started to speak.

Ambālī who was shaking her head in appreciation of *Sarasvathī*'s recital thought that that was not enough and that she must speak one or two words to compliment her. And she started speaking those words. '*Sādhuvachanam*' = words of appreciation. During music rechithals, we express our appreciation of the performance by exclaiming, '*Balē! Bhēsh! Sabāsh!*' - These are part of *sādhuвачana*. During public speeches the audience exclaims, 'Hear! Hear!' which words are also *sādhuвачana*.

In this way one or two words similar to '*Bhēsh!* or '*Sabāsh!*' came from *Ambālī*'s mouth.

Ambālī's mind was filled with joy and from her throat issued *sādhuвачana*, pleased with *Sarasvathī*'s performance. She spoke just one or two words; the *sādhuвачana* was not complete. '*Ārabdhē*' = just as she started to speak.

What happened as *Ambālī* started to speak, as she just began to compliment *Sarasvathī*? '*Thadhīyaih mādhyaiḥ apalapitha-thanthrikalaravām.*'

'*Thadhīyaih*' = its, that is of the *vachana*. *Ambālī* had just begun to speak; '*mādhyaiḥ*' = by its sweetness; '*apalapitha*' = disgraced; '*thantri*' = strings (wires of the *vīṇā*), '*alaravām*' = sweet sound.

The third line means: '*Sarasvathī*, having observed that the melodious strains of the strings of the *vīṇā* were disgraced by the sweetness of the words that *Ambālī* had just begun to speak...'

‘What sound is the sweetest?’ If we put this question to ourselves our answer would be: the sound of the *vīṇā* of *Sarasvathī*, the goddess of all arts. There can be nothing to equal it in mellifluence, the strains produced by its strings, so we should believe. If at all there is anything to equal it, it can only be the voice of *Sarasvathī*, so we should think.

However, as *Ambāl* began to speak ... Note that what she did was not sing but speak one or two words and that too without any *prāsa* or *anuprāsa*.... Well, as she began to speak, that is as no more than a few syllables had been heard from her, *Sarasvathī* and her *vīṇā* were silenced: her voice and the sound of her *vīṇā* were ‘defeated’ by the voice of *Ambāl*, by the sound of what little she had spoken. We saw that compared to the nectar of the moonlight of *Ambāl*’s face the nectar of the real moonlight was like sour gruel. Similarly, the sweetness of *Ambāl*’s voice, which was heard only for a moment, was such as to wipe out the impression created by the melody of the voice of *Sarasvathī* who had been singing for so long and of the strains of the *vīṇā* she had been playing at the same time.

As her voice was vanquished by *Ambāl*’s, *Sarasvathī* stopped singing, held her head down in shame. The *vīṇā* was disgraced. What did *Sarasvathī* do now?

‘*Nijām vīṇām Vāṇī nichulayathi chōlēna nibhrutham.*’

‘*Nijām*’ = one’s; her own; ‘*vīṇām*’ = *vīṇā* (objective case); ‘*chōlēna*’ = with the cover or case; ‘*nibhrutham*’ = concealed; ‘*nichulayathi*’ = covers. In the sweetness of *Ambāl*’s speech the sound of the *vīṇā* was vanquished; so *Sarasvathī* slips the instrument into its case.

Ordinary musicians would not concede that any other of their ilk is better than they. But *Sarasvathī* is different. She wholeheartedly accepted the fact that the strains of her *vīṇā* were poor

compared to *Ambāl*'s beautiful voice. She did not continue to sing or play the *vīṇā* even though she had received *Ambāl*'s compliments. She stopped playing and put the instrument back in its case.

Even though her own voice is so honeyed, in her magnanimity *Ambāl* had praise for *Sarasvathī*'s music and she nodded her head in appreciation of it. She did so in order to honour her. But *Sarasvathī*, instead of being further enthused, hung her head in shame. Here we see the magnanimity of both *Ambāl* and of *Sarasvathī*.

'Like a moth displaying itself before the sun, I demonstrated my art of music before one who is so sweet-throated,' thus *Sarasvathī* thought to herself, holding her head down.

If this is the case with *Sarasvathī*, what about her *vīṇā*? Was it not holding its head high haughtily? By 'head' is meant its resonating pot or bowl shaped like a big tortoise. After being vanquished by *Ambāl*'s voice, how could it stick its head out? When a man becomes insolvent, people refer to him thus: 'He goes about with his head covered.' When warriors, heroes, are disgraced in battle they take to flight with their heads covered. According to the *Śāsthras* we [sanyasis] have always to keep our heads covered with a cloth.

Sarasvathī decided that the vanquished *vīṇā* must not show its face to the world any more. She was truthful; so even if *Ambāl* had praised her *vīṇā* 'recital', she put the *vipanchi* back into its case.

A musician can stop his singing abruptly. Playing a stringed instrument is not like that. It has what is called 'anuraṇana': that is when you pluck the strings they keep resonating (or vibrating) for a few moments even after you release them from your fingers. The resonance or *rīṅāra* dies away only gradually. When you ring a

bell its sound, *ding, ding, ding*, takes moments to die away. Stringed instruments are like that. After *Ambāl* had spoken in praise of *Sarasvathī*'s performance, *Sarasvathī* could stop singing at once but the resonance of her *vīṇā* took moments to fade away. That is why she put it in its case as if telling it, 'Keep your mouth shut.' We may interpret the scene presented in the stanza in many such ways, finding delight in its poetic content.

Another point occurs to me. It is true that *Ambāl* was happy as *Sarasvathī* sang, and she shook her head and spoke a few words of appreciation. But was it all meant for *Sarasvathī*'s music? If not, what was she appreciating? The theme of *Sarasvathī*'s music was the sport of *Īśvarā*. And is it not likely that *Ambāl* paid more attention to the story of her husband told through the music, the text than to the music itself? And for that reason she might have shaken her head in appreciation. Or she should have found delight in the literary quality of the text. After listening to the sweet voice of *Ambāl*, *Sarasvathī* too could have thought thus: '*Ambāl* who has such a honeyed voice could not have appreciated my music. She must have found delight in the account of *Īśvara*'s sport or its high literary quality. But like a fool I thought she liked my music and continued my performance.' This could have increased her sense of shame.

On the whole the stanza presents a dramatic scene. There is the presence of *Ambāl*; *Sarasvathī* plays the *vīṇā* and sings; the compositions deal with the sport of *Paramēśvarā*, his exploits; *Ambāl* shakes her head delighted by the performance and expresses a few words of appreciation; after experiencing the unparalleled sweetness of *Ambāl*'s voice *Sarasvathī* hangs her head in shame and slips her *vīṇā* back into its case. This is a scene that we must visualise with our mind.

'Chōlēna' means with the cover or case, so I told you. '*Chōlī*' is cover. 'la' and 'la' are interchangeable-so '*chōlī*' can also be

‘*chōli*.’ For inanimate objects ‘*choli*’ means cover; for men it is a shirt or jacket. I understand that nowadays the jacket or blouse worn by women is called ‘*chōli*.’

The *Āchāryā* has blessed us with this stanza in the course of his portrayal of *Ambāl*. And he has composed it in such a manner that we are lost in wonder about the beauty of her speech. He also makes us aware that with her blessings we can acquire proficiency both in music and in letters.

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CREASES IN THE THROAT

THE MALE WHITE AND THE FEMALE RED

The *Saundaryalaharī* has another stanza (69) associating *Ambāl* with music.

Galē rēkhāsthirō gathi gamaka-gīthaika-nipunē
Vivāha-vyānaddha-praguṇaguṇa-Sankhyā-prathibhuvah
Virājanthē nānāvidha-madhura-rāgākara-bhuvām
Thrayāṇām grāmāṇām sthithi-niyama-sīmāna iva thē.

Sankara Bhagavatpādhā, the omniscient, knew all the 64 arts. This stanza shows how extensive and intensive his knowledge of music was. It contains a number of technical terms like ‘*gathi*’, ‘*gamaka*’, ‘*gītha*’ and ‘*grāma*’. Only musicians will be familiar with them, though those who are mere performing artists may not know all about them. Only those who have studied the theory of music, musicologists, will know all. The above terms will be found explained in the last part of Bharata’s *Nāṭya Śāsthra*, in *Sārangadeva’s Sangītharathnākara* and in Venkatamakhi’s *Chathurdaṇḍiprakāśikā*. My understanding of the subject is incomplete and to speak to you about it would be to tax your brain. ‘*Gathi*’ refers to what we now call ‘*tisra*’, ‘*miśra*’ and ‘*khanda*’ according to the ‘*māthras*’ [time units] of the *thālas*.

Gathi in Tamil is called 'nadai' and we have thus *khandanadai*, *thisranadai*, etc. 'Gamaka' is 'oscillating', 'shaking' a note, ornamenting it, or adding grace to it. The 'gāndhāra' in the rāga Thōdi and the rushabha in *Śāṅkarābharanam* are to be sung with gamakas. 'Gītha' we know means a song. The Āchāryā speaks of *Ambāl* as 'gathi-gamaka-gītha-ēka-nipunā': 'one without a second in her proficiency in gathi, gamaka and gīthā'. But he uses the terms not in the way we understand them but in a technical sense, that is strictly according to the *Śāsthra*. According to this, 'gathi' denotes 'rnārga' and 'dhēsi'. These are two paths in music. Gathi itself means path or way and *rnārga* also means the same thing. *Mārga* is a systematised school and the music in it is according to the path laid down in the *Śāsthras* -- it is like a railway track. The *rāgas* and *thālas* in it follow a system created by musicologists of the past and one has to adhere to a strict discipline in practising it. 'Dhēsi' is less rigorous, less bound by any system and in it importance is given to 'ranjakathvam' or what is pleasing. It has been evolved by musicians in different parts of India and the practitioners have a greater sense of freedom in it. 'Gamaka' as said before is oscillation and it has five categories governed by the time measure. And 'gīthā' consists not only of sāhithya or text but also of the svaras appropriate to it.

Then there is 'grāma' which is classified into three in music. This comes later in the stanza. Grāma means division of *rāgas* based on the shadja, madhyama and *gāndhāra* svaras - 'sa-grama', 'ma-grāma' and *Ga-grāma*. All the three are known only in the celestial world. In our world it seems *sa-grāma* and *ma-grāma* have existed long centuries ago. There is no *ga-grāma*. This is according to the commentator [*Lakshmīdhara*] of the *Saundaryalaharī* who lived five or six hundred years ago. I asked our musicologists about this and they said that there was only one grama now, the sa-grama. [The *Mahāswāmi* demonstrates by actually singing the svaras of this *grāma*.] The sa-grāma alone is in vogue today.

Vocal music originates in the throat. The human musical instrument, the sound box, is in it. The *Āchāryā* observes that the three *grāmas* exist in *Ambālī*'s throat as the three creases or folds in her neck. *Ambālī*, of course, has them. And it is because she has had them from the very beginning of Time that all women have them to show that they are indeed manifestations of her form.

All men have a round projection in their throats but not women. It is called the Adam's apple. They say [according to Christianity or the Semitic tradition] it is because Adam, the first man, ate the apple that carnal love sprang in his heart and, as a consequence, what we call '*samsāra*' came into being. The apple he ate partly stuck in his throat and so all males born after him (just as we take after our greatgrandmother, grandfather, etc) have the Adam's apple.

According to our *Śāsthras*, *Paramēśvarā* swallowed the *Kālakūta* poison making it into a pill. 'Then *Ambālī* held his throat with her hands to prevent the poison from going further down and it got stuck in the throat itself. It is the round object (the poison he took) in *Paramēśvarā*'s throat that is seen as the Adam's apple in all men. Indeed it shows the universality of *Paramēśvarā*, that he is present in everybody.

The two stories show that there is a common source or origin for all of us. So all of us are brethren, all of us form one kinship. The apple which is sweet and healthy - 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away' - becomes the cause of the terrible *samsāra*, the cause of our worldly existence. But when we regard *Īśvara* as the root of everything, as the source of all of us, even the bitter and terrible poison becomes ambrosia in his compassion for all beings and it does not do harm to anyone.

It is to show that all men are *Īśvara* and all women are *Ambālī* that the former have the Adam's apple in their throat and the latter have the three lines in the neck.

In *Thiruvaiyāru*, *Apparswāmigal* saw elephants, peacocks, hamsas, parrots of both genders as *Śiva* and *Śakthi* and exclaimed: 'I saw his sacred feet, I saw what is not seen.' If we have devotion, and use our intelligence a bit, we will see the *Śiva-Śakthi* pair everywhere.

Have I not been explaining, on the basis of the spectrum, that *Śiva* is white, that *Śakthi* is red, that from the quiescent and functionless *Śiva* has come *Kāmēśvarī* who is red in colour and that it is the functioning principle? It is amazing how in life in this world-as well as life in the next-white and red join together in manifold ways in the same manner as *Śiva* and *Śakthi*. To appreciate this phenomenon would be like having a glimpse of that divine couple. If we realise that matters relating to men are white and those relating to women are red, we will learn to look upon the world as a manifestation of *Śiva* and *Śakthi*.

A man's *sukla* or semen, what may be regarded as his very essence, is white. The word *sukla* itself means white. Similarly a woman has her '*sōṇitham*' (menstrual flow) which is red - the word itself means red. The vibhūti or sacred ashes a man wears is white while the kumkuma a woman wears is red. *Vaiśhṇavas* wear the namam: the white outer part of it represents Perumal or *Vishṇu* while the vertical red line in the centre represents the Mother (*Laksmī*) - the line is indeed called '*Śrīchūrnam*'. The *vēsthi* or *dhōthi* that a man wears is white while the sari that a woman wears is red. '*Kusumbhā*' means saffron: it is this colour that befits the sari. That is why even today the bridal sari or the sari made as an offering to *Ambāl* is lac-coloured. In the *Sahasranāmam* the colour of the sari worn by *Ambāl* is referred to as '*aruṇāruṇa-kausūmbham*'.

Among the examples of white and red combining together: our blood looks red but it consists of red and white corpuscles. Just

as the white *Siva* becomes the red *Kāmēśvarā* in *Ambāl*'s red, the red corpuscles conceal the white of the white corpuscles.

Round the *koṭam* (*rangōli*) we draw we use ochre: we also use it inside it. The walls of temples are painted with alternating white and ochre stripes. Even though *Vishṇu* or *Perumāl* is blue-complexioned, the walls of his temples are similarly painted (with red and white stripes).

Take the *abhishēka* performed to a deity: we use milk and honey in it.

The scented offering we make consists of white camphor and saffron and the flowers we use in *pūjā* have white jasmines and red *arālī* (*nerium*). The food we offer to the gods consists of 'curd rice' and sweet rice [rice cooked with jaggery which is brown-coloured.] Even *sambar-bhath* is red while we have a combination of white *idli* with red *milaga-podi* [powder made of red chillies and other ingredients.]

In the *idli*-chilli powder combination, *idli* is white and looks innocuous while the powder is 'fierce' being pungent. The white flag stands for truce, for peace, the red flag for revolution and revolt: we have here the *Śiva-santhi* and *Śakthi-rājasa* manifestations. As if *Śiva* and *Śakthi* must not be separated in this manner totally, it is the white corpuscles in our blood that 'quarrel' with the bacteria and viruses that cause disease while the red corpuscles are peaceful, feeding oxygen to the body and promoting growth. When blood is spilled in war it is the Red Cross that treats the injured and the ill.

In the spectrum red adheres to white, as if coming next to it. Opposite to red is violet. That is why opposite to *Śiva*, who represents *sānta* or peace, are the blue-complexioned *Vishṇu* (and blue is allied to violet), the blue *Vishṇu-Durgā* and the black *Kālī*,

all representing *Māyā* in full. *Kāmēśvarī*, who is red, touches *sānta* and goes up to the edge of *Māyā*...

Hence it is that in the : '*Pādukā Manthra*' of '*Thathva Śikhara*' it is said that the brilliant light that is the cause of the gross and the subtle is known as '*Thraipuram Mahas*'. While speaking about the expansion of the living world emanating from it, this is noted as '*Raktha-sūkla prabhā-misram*.' It is this mixture of the red and the white that pertains to the running of the outward actions and also to the inward tranquility of man.

The aspects of *Śiva* and *Śakthi* manifested outwardly in men and women are the Adam's apple and the three creases in the neck. The *Āchāryā* refers to these lines in the stanza by the words '*galē rēkhaḥ thisrah*'. *Ambālī* is proficient in gathi, gamaka and *gīthā* and what the *Āchāryā* says in the stanza can be taken to mean that the three subjects are symbolised by the three folds in her neck. This is not a matter of conjecture because it is explicitly stated that the three *rēkhas* 'in your neck demarcate the shadja, gāndhara and madhyama *grāmas* of music': '*thrayanam grāmānām sthithi-niyama-sīmāna iva the galē rēkhasthisrō virājanthē*.'

In an earlier stanza (25) occurs the words, '*thrayānām dēvānām thriguṇa-janithānām*'. The *Āchāryā* spoke there of the three deities originating from the three *guṇas*. Here (in this stanza) he refers obliquely, in the second line, to the three *guṇas*. What he expressly states here in the form of a simile is something everybody can understand. He speaks about the supremely auspicious marriage of *Śiva* and *Pārvathī*: '*vivāhavyānaddha-praguṇaguṇa-Saṅkhyā-prathibhuvah*'.

Īsvara performed the *māṅgalya-dhārāṇā* of *Ambālī*. '*Vivāhavyānaddhah*' = tied during the marriage. What is that *māṅgalyasūthra* like? '*Guṇa-Saṅkhyā*' = with a number of *guṇas*. '*Praguṇa*' means with *guṇa* of a lofty character. 'We are unable to

understand anything from the statement that the *maṅgalyasūthra* is of a high quality with its number of *guṇas*'.

When enumerating the *guṇas*, the *Āchāryā* mentions the three, *sathva*, *rajas* and *thamas*. The '*guṇa*' in '*praguṇa*' is a thread, that is *Ambāl*'s *māṅgalya-sūthra* consists of the three threads that are the three *guṇas* and made together. The three creases in *Ambāl*'s neck are a reminder of the three *guṇas*, a 'guarantee' for them: '*prathibhuvah*' means guarantee. There is an inner meaning to this, that the three lines are a metaphor for the three *guṇas*.

'*Pāṇigrahaṇa*' [the bride and the groom holding each other's hands] is the most important rite in a marriage ceremony and it is purely *Vēdhic*. This rite is universal in our land, observed in all parts of it and by all castes. Some people may say that the wearing of the *thālī* (*māṅgalyasūthra-dhāraṇa*) is not strictly one of the marriage rites. But it acquires importance in that the *Āchāryā* refers to *Īśvara* performing the *māṅgalya-dhāraṇa* of *Ambāl*. In *pāṇigrahaṇa* no permanent mark of *saumāṅgalya* is left. The hands are clasped and then released and there is nothing more to it. The *maṅgalyasūthra* has been the mark of *sumangalis* from time immemorial. Regarding it as worthy of worship, *sumangalis* reverently bring it to their eyes as they rise in the morning. *Pūjā* is performed to it during the time of the conjunction of *Magha* and *Phalguni* [March - April]. In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs this: '*Kamēśabaddha-maṅgalyasūthra-sōbhitha-kandharā*': 'one whose neck shines with the *maṅgalyasūthra* tied by *Kāmēśvarā*'.

The *Āchāryā* uses the word '*guṇam*', meaning thread (of cotton). But the thread smeared with turmeric for the *maṅgalyasūthra* is no longer fashionable. On the pretext that it becomes dirty married women nowadays wear a gold chain, (called *kodi* in Tamil), with the *thail* and beads attached to it. This is very wrong. If the thread gets dirty it can be smeared with

turmeric every day. All women, including the poor, have to wear the *maṅgalyasūthra* and the ear-ornament. So *Ambāl* is an example to them since even the very poor can afford the palm-leaf ear-ornament and the *maṅgalyasūthra* of cotton threads. The other ornaments *Ambāl* wears, like the crown encrusted with the nine gems, the gold girdle are extra, being not compulsory for women.

Ambāl's neck has three creases: *gathi*, *gamaka* and *gīthā* make three; the *guṇas* are three; and the *maṅgalyasūthra* is made of three threads intertwined.

There are a number of *saṃpradāyas* or traditions in music and each of them must be preserved in its pristine form. The three *grāmas* or scales must not be intermingled. These are represented by the three folds in *Ambāl*'s neck, folds that demarcate the boundaries of the three *grāmas*. The *Āchāryā* shows how disciplined one must be in *nādhōpāśana*, worship through sound or music, the quest through music.

If *nādhōpāśana* is pursued with devotion, if one sings with utter devotion, music will show the way for one to have a vision of *Īśvarā*.

When one becomes absorbed in *śruthi* and *laya*, one becomes absorbed in the *Āthmā* and one is led to the non-dualistic goal. Like Thyagaraja who sang '*Endarō mahānubhāvulu*' there have been many who realised the Self through *nadhōpāśana*; even today there must be such practitioners of *nādhōpāśana*. Thyagayya himself was a *mahānubhāva*. Along with him there were two more who had realisation through music: the three are called the '*Thrimūrthi*' (Trinity) of music. Amazingly enough these three lived at the same time, about 150 years ago.

The *guṇas* are three; *sathva*, *rajas* and *thamas*. But since they combine in different proportions, the attitudes of mind formed as a result, the ways of thinking, of looking at things, are

limitless. With the 51 letters of the (Sanskrit) alphabet, hundreds of thousands of words are formed. Similarly, with the permutation and combination of the seven svaras many, many, ragas have been formed. This is referred to in the stanza thus: '*nānāvidha-madhura-rāgakara-bhuvam*', generating a mine of *rāgas* of different sweetness. We must read this with the fourth line, 'the three *grāmas* that generate them'.

'*Rāga akaram*' means a mine of *rāgas*. When we keep digging in a mine, gold and precious stones are obtained. In the same way when we keep digging into the mine of svaras more and more *rāgas* will be thrown up. Since the ocean yields gems it is called '*ratnākara*'. '*Karuṇākara*' or '*Dayākara*' is taken to mean 'one who bestows compassion'; but the correct meaning is a 'mine of compassion'.

When the svaras are combined in various ways the resulting *rāgas* must be pleasing to the ear and must make the mind calm and happy.

Combining svaras in a way that does not please the mind is like performing acrobatics; and such combinations of svaras cannot be true *rāgas*. That is why the *Āchāryā* says: '*nānāvidha-madhura-rāga*'. *Mādhurya*, sweetness, is important. Like *Ambāl* of whom he speaks, the *Āchāryā* was omniscient and he had a profound knowledge of music. However, not remaining a mere theorist, he underlines sweetness as the most important characteristic of a *rāga*.

All the *rāgas* are enfolded by the three creases in the throat of *Ambāl*. In the throat of *Īśvara* a deadly poison has been transformed into ambrosia. The projection in his throat (Adam's apple) and the three lines in *Ambāl*'s neck remind us of their presence in all men and women and also their universal non-dualistic aspect.

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BEAUTY OF HANDS

After describing *Ambāl*'s neck the *Āchāryā* speaks about the beauty of her hands in two stanzas (70, 71). Is not the hand usually likened to the lotus? In keeping with this literary tradition, the *Āchāryā* relates one hand of *Ambāl* with *Brahmā* who sprang from the lotus and the other hand with his (*Brahmā*'s) mother *Padmavathī* or *Lakshmī*.

Śiva punishes, *Ambāl* protects. If he shows that 'awarding punishment is the duty of the father', she shows that 'compassion is personified by the mother'. Like *Paramēśvarā Brahmā* too had originally five heads. But when he committed a wrong, *Śiva* punished him by plucking off one of his heads and made him 'Chathurmukha' (four-headed), so goes the story. The *Āchāryā* refers to the story of how *Brahmā* saved his remaining four heads, the meritorious deed he performed for the same (Stanza 70). This was nothing more than rushing to *Ambāl* for refuge, for abhaya, freedom from fear. In a previous stanza (4) the *Āchāryā* said that *Ambāl* did not grant abhaya with her hand but with her foot. Here it is the beauty of his poetic imagination that makes him give expression to a different idea, that *Ambāl* grants her abhaya with her hand. How many hands does *Ambāl* have? Four. *Brahmā* has four heads remaining. *Brahmā* is 'Sarasijabhava', born of the lotus. *Ambāl*'s hands are also like lotuses. The hand starting from the shoulder is like the stem of a lotus and the hand at the end of it is like a lotus flower. One lotus helps another being of the same species! *Brahmā* who rose from the lotus prays to the four lotus hands of *Ambāl* for the safety of his four heads: it is thus that he saved his remaining heads, says the *Āchāryā*.

The *Āchāryā* now thinks that comparing *Ambāl*'s hands to lotuses is to depreciate them. So in the next stanza he makes a 'correction of the error' by bringing in *Lakshmī*. The tapering end

of the lotus petal is more red than the rest of it. As for *Ambāl's* hands, the tips of her fingers- the latter having the place of the lotus petals - are more red than the tips of the lotus petals without her having applied any colour or varnish to them (the tips of her fingers). 'Can the beauty of such lustre be obtained by the lotus?' asks the *Āchāryā*. 'I made a wrong comparison. But did I not do so with the very words gifted by *Ambāl*? Can they yield any wrong meaning? So let me see if I can find an answer to my doubts by taking my imagination further.' It is the answer he found for his question that he has expressed in the form of a *ślōka*.

What answer did he find? 'Laksmī applied lac to her feet with her fingers and with those fingers she playfully pinches the petals of the lotus. Then would not the red lustre of the tips of the lotus petals increase threefold? Will this lustre not come up to that of *Ambāl's* hand? The *Āchāryā* thus tries to justify his comparison.

Even then he does not say that the lotus has the glow of *Ambāl's* hand. All he says is: '*kayāchidhvā samyam bhajathu kalayā*': 'somehow it has only a fraction of that glow'.

Since they are associated with *Lakshmī*, *Ambāl's* hands confer on us *Śrī*, all good fortune: such is the import of the stanza.

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MILK OF JNĀNA

As part of the *keśādhi-pādhānthā* description of *Ambāl*, the *Āchāryā* now depicts her bosom in a few stanzas. In one of them (73) he gives the reason for her breast milk being superior to amrutha, the divine ambrosia. The celestials who have had ambrosia are eternally young; they remain middle-aged always. Ganapathi and Subrahmanya who have had *Ambāl's* breast-milk remain eternally boyish and do not age. '*Kumārau adhyāpi*' even today they remain boys.

What is the inner meaning of this? The greatness of *Ambāl's* breast milk is such that her two children who have had it are *jnāna* personified and they know no *kāma*. 'Avidhitha-Vadhūsangarasikau kumarau': they know not what is *sthṛībhōga* [sexual enjoyment with women]. The *Āchāryā* himself was an example in this matter. The celestials passed from boyhood to middle age and did not age further because of their having partaken of amrutha. But they are all the time after petty pleasure. So the ambrosia of the breast-milk of *Ambāl* who is an ocean of beauty is far superior to that churned out of the ocean of milk.

In the South, *Gaṇapathi* is believed to be a brahmachāri; while *Subrahmaṇya* has two consorts, *Valli* and *Dēvasēna*. In the North, *Subrahmaṇya* is a brahmachāri while *Gaṇapathi* has *Siddhi* and *Buddhi* as his consorts. The *Āchāryā* who exemplified the uttermost limits of brahmacharya brings together the Southern *Gaṇapathi* and the Northern *Subrahmaṇya*. He shows that *Ambāl's* breast-milk is the milk of *jnāna*.

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THE TAMIL CHILD

In a subsequent stanza (75) the *Āchāryā* remarks that *Ambāl's* breast-milk creates poets of *jnāna*: They compose poetry out of the *jnāna* acquired by them by virtue of that milk and impart it [the *jnāna*] to others through their work.

'Mother, your breast-milk produces *jnāna*, compassion, beauty and all else that is of excellence arising from your heart': 'hrudhayathah payah pārāvārah parivahathi', 'rising from your heart as an ocean'. It is like the essence of *Sarasvathī* who is the goddess of learning and the arts: 'Sārasvathamiva'. 'You suckled the Tamil child with that milk of *jnāna*'. The *Āchāryā* speaks of the 'Drāvida-sīsu', Tamil child. What happened to the child by its taking in *Ambāl's* breast-milk? '*Kavīnām praudhānām ajani*

kamaṇīyah kavayithā': it made the child a poet who in attracting the minds [of the learned] became foremost among mature poets.

'Praudakavi' means a poet who can compose poetry rich in substance, pregnant with meaning. A girl who has had her menarche is called prauda. Like potency in the body is potency in words and a poet who has it is a 'prauda kavi'. Such poets are likely to hold their heads high; people who are prauda will be proud. In their poetry there will be much intellectual jugglery though it may be lacking in elements that touch the heart. From the Supreme Being's breast-milk flows an ocean of milk: '*payah pārāvārah parivahathi*'. In this *Saundaryalaharī* so many *laharīs* have been mentioned and to them is added the *laharī* of *Ambālī*'s breast-milk, the *laharī* of her motherhood, that is sweeter than anything else. The child who takes in such milk, as the *Āchāryā* observes, becomes a poet and his poems will attract all hearts - '*kamaṇīya*' means that and he will have the distinction of being a prauda kavi among prauda kavis [a mature poet among mature poets].

This 'Dravida-sisu', Tamil child, who drank *Ambālī*'s milk of *jñāna* may seem to us to be *Jñānasambāndhar*, author of the *Thēvāram*. His period is the 7th century A.D. Roughly speaking the *Āchāryā* lived between late 6th century B.C. and early 5th century. There is a gap of more than a thousand years between the time of the *Āchāryā* and that of *Jñānasambāndhar*].

Most commentators of the *Saundaryalaharī* point out that, when the *Āchāryā* was a child, *Ambālī* suckled him, blessed him with her milk. They further say that he is referring to himself, with poetic grace, in third person as 'Dravida - sisu'. That is he does not say boastfully, 'It was I who drank *Ambālī*'s milk of *jñāna*', but refers to himself in all humility as someone unknown. The language called Malayalam came into existence only about a thousand years ago. Until then Tamil was the language there (that

is Kerala) and it is also part of the Dravida land. So there is plenty of room for the *Āchāryā* referring to himself as Dravida *śiṣu* and it is a matter of great pride for us.

However, I spoke about humility. We saw that it was a special trait of the *Āchāryā*'s character. So would one like him, even if he referred to himself in the third person, speak about the child in question becoming the most distinguished among mature poets attracting the hearts of all with his creations? Such a question does arise. But if you gave some thought to it, you would realise that it is not altogether inappropriate. The question here is the greatness of *Ambāl*'s breast-milk. When speaking about the potent manner in which it endows one with the genius of poesy, is it not reasonable to illustrate it with an actual, known, example. The *Āchāryā*, we must remember, remaining in a far-off place, prayed to *Ambāl* in all humility for her *kataksha*. If such a one claims that *Ambāl*'s breast-milk raised him to the position of the universal monarch of poet does it not mean that, at the same time, he sings the glory of that milk.

There are many stories relating to the Tamil child. Despite the efforts of commentators of the past and researchers of the present there is no conclusive answer to the question of who the child referred to is. What we need is the thirst for *Ambāl*'s milk of *jñāna*. It does not matter to us, it is not a matter of profit or gain for us, to know who the Dravida *śiṣu* is. We do not also need even the gift of writing poetry. It would be enough if we keep praying to *Jñānambal* for *jñāna*.

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THE KNEES OF A PATHIVRATHĀ

As the *Āchāryā* continues his *kēsādhīpādha* depiction of *Ambāl*, after describing her sacred body, i.e., her torso, waist and

so on, according to the poetic tradition, he concludes with the goddess's feet. Following the poetic custom, *Ambāl* (the nāyaki, heroine,) is shown a step above *Īsvarā*, the nāyaka or hero. The *Āchāryā* shows him pining for her. He says that *Kāma*, who was restored to life by *Kāmēśvarī*, triumphs over *Īsvarā*, using *Kāmēśvarī* herself for the purpose. We must read these passages and appreciate them with a pure heart, taking them as composed in accordance with our poetic convention. We must not treat them as representing real life, nor should we elaborate upon them. We can do so only if we have devotion and humility. It is thus that for centuries people have been reading the hymn with religious devotion. The text of the *Saundaryalaharīs* such as to encourage people to take such an attitude while reading it. So there is no need for me to tell you that you must read it 'with this or that attitude.'

As a poet, *Śankara* Bhagavatpadha shows the heroine (*Ambāl*) to be superior to the hero (*Īsvarā*). But, then, he is also an *Āchāryā* and as such he has to show the wife to be a *pathivrathā* subservient to the husband and this he does not forget. That is why, when speaking about the knees of *Ambāl* (Stanza 82), he says: 'pathyuh pranātikathinābhyām.' *Ambāl*'s legs are soft like the trunks of elephants and plantain stalks of gold but her knees alone have become hardened. It is the case with everybody but it does not behove a poet to leave it at that. The *Āchāryā* gives a reason for it as a poet but, while doing so, he also speaks as an *āchāryā* concerned with dharma. *Ambāl* is a great *pathivrathā* and in her humility she keeps prostrating herself before her husband again and again. When women perform their prostrations they bend in their legs, the middle part of them touching the earth or ground. By constantly, untiringly, making prostrations before *Īsvara* *Ambāl*'s knees become calloused. 'pathyuh pranāthi kathinābhyām': 'patyuh' = to or before the husband; 'pranāthi' = prostrating herself; 'kathinābhyām' = calloused, hardened; 'jānubhyam' = the two knees.

The *Āchāryā* addresses *Ambāl* by two names. One is 'Girisuthā' [that is 'Girisuthē']; the other is 'Vidhijnē' ['Vidhijnā']. 'Girisuthē' means Daughter of the Mountain. Mountain is stone and as the daughter of stone her knees are stony-this idea is hinted at by the *Āchāryā*. Then as preceptor of dharma, he addresses *Ambāl* as 'Vidhijnē', which name means 'you who know the injunctions of the *Śāsthras*.' The *Sahasranāmam* has a name of *Ambāl* which means the one who laid down rules according to the *Vēdhās* - '*Nijajnā-rūpa-nigamā*.' She herself becomes an example to others by strictly following these rules. That is how, in keeping with the tenets of dharma, the wife prostrates herself before her husband and her knees become hardened. The *Āchāryā* suggests all this by means of using a single word in the vocative, 'Vidhijnē.'

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THE BHAGAVATPĀDHĀ AND THE BHAGAVATĪPĀDHĀ

The *Āchāryā* comes to describe the sacred feet of *Ambāl*. These are the feet we must go to and fall at. These are the feet that we must grasp and seek for refuge. We are not asked to grasp the hands or face of *Ambāl* nor her neck. We must hold her feet alone. We must clasp them if we are to be freed from karma and janma [*samsāra* or worldly existence] that have us in their grip.

Can we approach *Ambāl* as we like and hold her feet? We can do so only when she likes our doing so. It is for the sake of this, to hold her feet, that the *Āchāryā* prays to her. Instead of saying, 'I must hold your feet', he beseeches her, 'You must give them to me so that I may grasp them. Out of your compassion and grace, Mother, you must give your feet for me to hold.' '*Dhayayā dhēhi charaṇau*' (Stanza 84)

*Śruthinām mūrdhānō dadhathi thava yau sēkharathayā
Mamāpyēthau Māthah sirasi dha yayā dhēhi charañau
Yayōh pādhyam pāthah Pasupathi jatājūta-thatinī
Yayōr lākshā Lakshmīrarurā-harichūdāmañi-ruchih*

While stating that *Ambālī*'s milk of *jnāna* bestows the gift of poesy of an elevated character, poesy that touches the hearts of all, the *Āchāryā* adds that the milk is fed by *Ambālī* herself out of her compassion 'dayāvathyā dhaththam.' 'Dhayayā dhēhi', so he says in the present stanza pertaining to her feet. Did he not say in another stanza that *Ambālī*'s milk of *jnāna* is superior to the celestial ambrosia? Similarly he says that the feet that she permits us to hold, out of her compassion, vouchsafe us the ambrosia of the *sahasrāra* [the one-thousand-petalled lotus in the head, according to Kuṇḍalini yōga] that is also superior to the amrutha of the celestials and makes us the embodiment of *jnāna*. An *āchāryā* gives dīksha or initiation to his disciple by placing his foot on his head: this is meant to create a flow of nectar in his (the disciple's) *sahasrāra*.

Our *Āchāryā* is himself an embodiment of *jnāna*. But here he regards *Ambālī* herself as an *āchāryā* and prays to her to place her foot on his head: 'sirasi dhayayā dhēhi charanau.' Although he asks for *Ambālī*'s feet to be placed on his head he does not explicitly state that its purpose is initiation of the disciple by the guru. Matters like initiation are to be kept a secret, so he expresses the idea only obliquely. In the *Kēnōpanishad*, *Parāśakthi* appears as *Jnānāmbikā* and gives instruction in *jnāna* to Indra. The *Āchāryā* hints at this here and says that what we should pray for, what all of us should pray for, is *Ambālī*'s *prasāda* or her grace of *jnānimruta* (ambrosia of *jnāna*). What is the hint? 'śruthinām mūrdhānō dhadhathi thava charañau sēkharathayā': the indication is in these words 'The Upanishads which are the head of *śruthi*, that is the *Vēdhās*, wear your feet as their head ornament.' In the

Dasōpanishad (the Ten Upanishads) there is no reference anywhere to *Paramēśvarā* or *Mahāviṣṇu* appearing as a guru to impart instruction (in *jnāni*). Not only do they not appear as gurus, they are not mentioned in any other role or context. In the *Katōpanishad* the state of libearthion is described as all-pervading and it is referred to as '*Viṣṇu*' (1.3.9); and when the same is called *thurīyam* it is referred to as '*Śivam*', in the sense of auspicious, in the *Māndūkyōpanishad*. These references are to two states, not to two individuals or deities. *Ambāl* is specifically referred to as Uma and Haimavathi in the *Kēnōpanishad* and also as '*Sthri*', as one who is immensely radiant, '*bahusōbhamāna*'. That she gave instruction to Indra in *jnāna* is also mentioned. Apart from this there is no other basis for the *Āchāryā* to observe that the Upanishads wear *Ambāl* as a head ornament.

Instead of saying, 'Mother, place your feet on my head,' the *Āchāryā* says, '*Māmapi śirasi*', 'on my head too.' 'On my head too Mother, place your feet.' Thus he shows again his incomparable humility. Earlier in similar manner, he prays to *Ambāl* to bathe him also in her sidelong glance of compassion: '*snapaya krūpayā māmapi*'. The *Āchāryā* represents the pinnacle of knowledge and wisdom. In his perception truths, in inward realisation, in his ability to do work, in his power expression, he occupies the highest place-and yet there is no one humbler than he. He is the highest among those who lower themselves.

'Your feet are an ornament for the Upanishads which are the head of Mother *Vēdhā*. Even *Paramasīva* and *Mahāviṣṇu* prostrate themselves before you, placing their heads on them. On your feet which are the head-ornament of the Upanishads flows the Ganga who is the head ornament of *Śiva*, and who becomes the *pādhyā thīrtha* of *Ambāl* [that is the water poured on the feet as *arghya*, *padhya* and *āchamanīya* which are among the sixteen rites

of adoring a deity]. The light cast on her feet by the crest-jewel worn by *Mahāvishṇu* is the sandal-paste smeared on them. Your feet that you gracefully presented to Mother *Vēdhā*, to the lords of the *Vēdhās*, *Īsvara* and *Vishṇu* and deities like them, how do I deserve to hold the same? But undeserving though I be, you have something called compassion, haven't you? Grace me too, Mother, out of that compassion of yours.' 'Matah ēthau charaṇau māmapi siraṣi dhayayā dhēhi,' thus prays the *Āchāryā* with his heart melting in devotion. Earlier when he prayed for *Ambālī's* sidelong glance, he used the word 'krupayā'; here it is 'dhayayā'.

When the *pādhyā thirtha* is Ganga, it means that *Īsvara* makes his other wife (sakalathri) also fall at *Ambālī's* feet. '*Sarōshā Gangāyām*': when *Ambālī* looks at Ganga, anger comes bubbling up in her eyes. It is to appease her that *Īsvara* makes Ganga fall at her feet. When the *Āchāryā* speaks of the light of the crest-jewel worn by *Mahāvishṇu* imparting *Ambālī's* feet the lustre of nalangu he uses the word '*Lakshmī*' for lustre. '*Lāksha Lakshmī*' means the lustre of lac. In using these words the *Āchāryā* suggests that *Mahāvishṇu* too makes his wife fall at the feet of *Ambālī*. In a previous stanza he said that the lac on the feet of *Lakshmī*, who was seated in the lotus, gave its petals an extra hue of redness, thus making them nearly as red as *Ambālī's* hands. Wondering perhaps whether associating *Ambālī's* hands with *Lakshmī's* feet would seem sacrilegious to some, the *Āchāryā* compensates for it by observing that *Lakshmī* is present in *Ambālī's* feet in the form of the lustre of lac. I have already spoken to you about *Sarasvathī* being associated with this matter of lac: that the sacred nectarine water of *Ambālī's* feet, that is the water mixed with lac, endows one with the gift of poetry like *Sarasvathī's* betel juice. A basic idea expressed by the *Āchāryā* takes root, grows into a tree and branches out in many ways. It would be interesting to do research into the subject.

Brahmā and *Vishṇu* went in search of the head and feet of *Paramēśvarā* regarded as the Supreme God. *Ambāl* was not engaged in this quest. Here there is no mention of anyone going on a similar search. But the one whose feet *Mahāvishṇu* went in search of, that is *Īśvarā*, he himself pays obeisance at *Ambāl*'s feet. From the words 'laksha *Lakshmī*' we may take it that *Mahāvishṇu* prostrates himself before her along with *Lakshmī*. Since both of them, *Vishṇu* and *Lakshmī*, are mentioned we may extend the idea to include their son *Brahmā* too among those who fall at her feet in devotion. All the three of the *Thrimūrthi* may be regarded as making prostrations together before *Parāśakthi*. In the first section of the hymn (in Stanza 25) we saw the *Thrimūrthi* paying obeisance to *Ambāl*, keeping their folded hands raised above their heads, thus performing *pūjā* to the goddess. In the second section also (in Stanza 89) it is said that *Ambāl*'s feet are more munificent than the celestial Kalpa tree. The *Āchāryā* observes that the folded hands of celestial women which are shaped like folded lotuses are placed in adoration at the feet of *Ambāl*. He also gives a reason for the lotuses folding. The white toenails of *Ambāl*'s red feet look like the rows of teeth in a laughing face that is red complexioned. The white teeth resemble moonlight; and lotuses fold in moonlight; and that is how the lotuses that are the hands of the celestial maidens are folded.

Ambāl's feet are the flowers worn by Mother *Vēdhā* on her head. Like *Brahmā* and *Vishṇu* going in search of the head and feet of *Śiva*, the *Vēdhās*; seek the feet of the *Paramāthmā*. The *Āchāryā* notices that they do find those feet. How? *Ambāl* herself must have kept those feet on Mother *Vēdhā*'s head out of her compassion-*'dhayayā'*. 'Extending that compassion may my head also obtain those feet,' so the *Āchāryā* prays to *Ambāl*. He himself becomes an embodiment of those feet, the one who has earned the name of '*Bhagavatpadha*'.

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THE LOTUS THAT BLOOMS IN THE MIND-STONE

The sacred feet of *Ambāl* are referred to as flowers, as lotuses - '*charaṇaravindam*'. The *Āchāryā* asks *Ambāl* (in Stanza 88): 'During your marriage how could your husband place your foot, tender like a flower on the rocklike grinding-stone?' 'Katham va' = how;? 'Bāhubhyām' with his hands; 'upayamanakāle' = during your marriage. 'Upanayana is the prelude to the brahmacharya stage of life, while 'upayamana is the start of the householder's stage of life. 'Upayamana kalē purabhidhā ('*Purabhidhā*' means 'by *Paramēśvarā*' who slew the Thripura demon) '*dhrushādhi nyastham*' = placed on the (grinding) stone. The *Āchāryā* who asks like this does not say 'how hard-hearted he is'; in fact he says the opposite, '*dhayamānēna manasā*', 'with a compassionate heart that blesses'.

We may put forward two reasons for the *Āchāryā* saying so. An idiot is mockingly or ironically called a '*Bruhaspathi*'. It may be in the same way that the *Āchāryā* here calls *Īsvara* kind-hearted. Or he means what he says; there is no mockery or irony in it. We must take here the help of the *Śivānandalaharī*. If we make a comparative study of the *Āchāryā*'s two Laharīs (*Saundaryalaharī* and *Śivānandalaharī*), see how they complement each other, we will be able to unearth many treasures by way of meaning. In the *Śivānandalaharī* the *Āchāryā* expresses a view that touches our hearts (Stanza 80). He asks *Śiva* about the *Pradōsha thāṇḍava* he is performing on *Kailāsā*: 'If you wish to dance is there no smooth and shiny stage for you in the celestial world? Are there no devotees who will spread a carpet of flowers for you to dance upon? Leaving it all you are dancing on these rocks with your feet that are soft like flowers. Is it not because you know that I will be born with a rocklike heart that - since you will want to dance in it - you are training yourself by dancing on this mountain terrain?'

Here *Paramēśvarā*'s marriage is mentioned as 'upayamanam'. It is with reason that the *Āchāryā* uses a somewhat unfamiliar word. A child is entrusted to a guru so as to bring him under a certain discipline and to lead him on the right path. In the same way, upayamanam means entrusting a girl to her husband to take her on the right path and bring her under discipline.

Now to set an example to all women in the world, *Parāśakthi* herself, during her marriage, receives upayamana from *Paramēśvarā* like an ordinary woman. Then, out of his compassion for all mankind - it was true compassion, '*dhayamānēna manasā*' - he wanted her also to dance with him in the minds of their children. It was as training for this, so he must have thought, that he placed her foot on the grinding stone.

Meditating on the feet of *Ambāl* is a means of softening our minds, of melting our hearts, which are hard like grinding stones. There is no religion, no philosophical system, greater than this. We must make ourselves children of innocence and place her feet in our minds, in our *hearts*, place them on our head which is the source of our minds, our consciousness. We must do so in our imagination; we must feel with all our heart that her feet are placed on our head. If we are aware that *Ambāl*'s feet are on our head, there is nothing else needed to realise the bliss of the Brahman. *Ambāl* placed her feet on a buffalo [*Mahishāsura*] and made him *jñāna* personified and blessed him with oneness with her. That is why we are enjoined in the *Sapthasathi* Kalpa to perform *pūjā* to the goddess along with *Mahishāsura*.

It is our ego-sense that has us in its grip and causes us so much suffering. The way to eradicate it is meditating on her feet. The celestials were smug in the belief that they had accomplished everything on their own. The *Āchāryā* reminds us of their initial boastfulness, how they were later shorn of their arrogance and of

the Upanishadhic story which mentions how *Ambāl* blessed them with *jnāna*. It is while reminding us of this story that he uses the term 'māmapī', without any ego or self-pride. It does not matter when we will in fact attain the feet of *Ambāl*. Let us now be her children, perform her *pūjā*, place on our head one of the flowers offered at the feet of her idol and pray to her for the day when we will have *dharṣan* of her feet.

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SURRENDERING AT AMBĀL'S FEET

The feet are meant for walking. In poetry heroines are depicted as having the gait of hamsas. The *Āchāryā* has composed a stanza that expresses an idea different from this. According to it hamsas wanted to have the same beauty of gait as is *Ambāl*'s, and to learn to 'walk' like her they kept going from place to place with her. Out of kindness for the birds, *Ambāl*'s feet taught them how to walk gracefully by actual 'demonstration'. Not only that, they taught the birds verbally the 'theory' behind the beautiful gait of *Ambāl*. How? *Ambāl*'s anklets fitted with bells make the sound of *jal jal* when she walks. It is this *jal-jal* [the tintinnabulation] that is the 'theory' taught to the hamsas representing the words constituting the text of the theory. In an earlier stanza (60) the *Āchāryā* said that the *jan jan* sound made by *Ambāl*'s ear ornaments was her appreciation of *Sarasvathī*'s music. Here the vehicle of *Sarasvathī* (that is the hamsa) receives lessons in 'walking' gracefully from *Ambāl*'s anklets.

Actually, the anklet itself has the name of 'hamsakam'. *Mūka* has made a pun on the word. For some reason the *Āchāryā* has not done the same. Perhaps he 'reserved' the idea for *Mūka*. 'Hamsa' also denotes a *sannyāsi*. We speak of 'Paramahamsas'. Perhaps the *Āchāryā* in his large-heartedness left it for *Mūka* to make a pun on the word.

In the last stanza devoted to the keśādhīpādha portrayal of *Ambāl*, the *Āchāryā* prays that his sense organs and mind must become absorbed at the feet of *Ambāl*. I have already spoken about it. In the version of the hymn that is more in vogue, this stanza comes before the one in which the *Āchāryā* deals with hamsas being taught by her anklets to walk like *Ambāl*. But I have seen the version in which the order of the two stanzas, is reversed. I feel that a really fitting conclusion to the portrayal of *Ambāl*'s body is the stanza which says, 'May the bee which is my life and the six legs which are made up of my five sense organs and my mind become interred at your sacred lotus feet': '*thava charane nimajjan majjivah Karañacharañah shadcharaṇāthām*'.

The *Āchāryā* has expressed the idea of the bee and the lotus in his *Subrahmaṇya-Bhujangam* and somewhat differently in his *Shadpadhīsthōthram*.

In the version more in vogue the stanza beginning with the words, 'kadā kālē māthah....', comes in place of the stanza with which the description of *Ambāl*'s feet is concluded in the other version. It is in the former ('kadā kālē māthah....') that the *Āchāryā*, regarding himself as a vidhyarthi, as a student, asks when the day will come for him to imbibe the sacred water of *Ambāl*'s feet and become adept in learning. That a stanza containing this idea occurs in the midst of the verses describing *Ambāl*'s feet is also apt. Apart from this, in the more popular version the stanzas dealing with *Sarasvathī*, *Lakshmī* and *Ambāl* do not occur consecutively. The 'kadā kālē' stanza provides a break after the first two are spoken of. And it is followed by the third stanza dealing with the goddesses. In the version I am following here the three stanzas come together without a break.

I am not asking you to change the order of the stanzas. It is all right to read the hymn whatever the order of the *ślokas*.

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EVEN THE LOTUS IS NO MATCH

The feet of *Ambāl* are compared to lotuses, but these flowers cannot be a true object of comparison. The sacred feet of *Ambāl* are the sacred feet of *Ambāl*. It is not possible to know their excellence by likening them to anything else. In an earlier stanza (87), the *Āchāryā* shows the different ways in which *Ambāl*'s feet are superior to lotuses.

In what different ways? The lotus wilts in the snow 'himēni hanthavyam'. What about *Ambāl*'s sacred feet? '*Himagiri-nivāsaikachathurau*': they are capable of being in the mountain of snow, that is the Himalaya. The Himalaya is *Ambāl*'s home; she was born there; and she was not married in a distant place; the home of the one whom she married is also the Himalaya. Thus her feet will neither wilt nor fade as she walks in the snow. Secondly, the lotus folds or seems to sleep at night; '*niśāyām nidhrāṇam*'. The folding of the lotus at night is like one sleeping with one's eyes closed; hence the use of the word '*nidhrāṇam*'. *Ambāl*'s feet are always on the move, even the whole night, taking the goddess to her devotees whenever it is time to bless them. '*Niśi charamabhāgē cha visadhau*': awake the whole night ablossom. Thirdly, the lotus desires *Lakshmī* to reside in it: '*varam Lakshmīpāthram*': it thinks it is a matter of pride for it to keep *Lakshmī* within its petals. What about the sacred feet of *Ambāl*? '*Śriyam athisrujanthau samayinām*': they create *Lakshmī* for each and every one of those who follow the way of worshipping *Ambāl* called 'Samaya'. It means they, *Ambāl*'s sacred feet, grant her devotees good fortune in all respects. The sacred feet confer on *Ambāl*'s devotees all auspiciousness, all wealth. If the lotus keep *Lakshmī* within itself, the sacred feet of *Ambāl* pours out *Lakshmī* to everyone. '*Sarojam thvathpādhau janani jayathaschithramiha kim*': 'Mother, your feet triumph over the lotus. What is there to wonder about it?' *Ambāl*'s auspicious feet are *Ambāl*'s auspicious feet.

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RED HAS ITS GLORY

All parts of *Ambāl*'s body, all the waves of the ocean of beauty that she is, have been described by the *Āchāryā*, in words that confer her blessings on us. Now (in Stanza 92) he deals with the seat which is graced by her entire presence. In this verse he also speaks about the radiance of red emanating together from all parts of her body. In the *Sahasranāmam* we have this in the beginning, '*Udhyadh-bhānusahasrābhā*' ('one with the effulgence of a thousand rising suns') and then comes the *pādhādhi-kēśānthā* description of *Ambāl*. To be different, the *Āchāryā* first paints a portrait of *Ambāl*'s body from the hair on her head to her feet and then describes the lustre of her body as a whole.

I have already spoken about the throne of *Ambāl*. Its legs are made up of four of the panchakruthya deities and the fifth serves the purpose of the actual seat; it is indeed an astonishing kind of throne.

The *Āchāryā* speaks about the glory of the red lustre of *Ambāl* seated on it as *Rajarājēśvarī*. By its impact [of the red lustre] the white-complexioned *Śiva* turns red as *Kāmēśvarā*. If the two are to remain as *Kāmēśvarā* and *Kāmēśvarī*, or as Father and Mother, for the purpose of the creation of the world, he (*Śiva*) has to be a nayaka of *Srungāra* or love. The colour of *Srungāra* is red, so to the eye of *Ambāl* *Śiva* looks the personification of that rasa or mood. Here we have an integrated view of poetry, metaphysics and the theory of light.

With *Ambāl*'s power *Śiva*, the supreme yōgi, becomes an embodiment of *Srungāra*. But, turning this idea round, we must understand the same thus: that *Ambāl* can make even one steeped in desire or love a great yōgi. To eradicate desire and other passions in us we must go to *Kāmākshī* herself for refuge. When the hymn speaks of 'evolution', we must fix our minds on its

obverse side of involution and we must go to *Ambāl* for refuge to become absorbed within that which was manifested outside. Is not the setting sun also as red as the rising sun? So, as we speak of the *Srungāra* of the rising sun, we must remind ourselves of the setting sun that signifies *samādhi* (final absorption).

Red stands for power, the potency of action. White stands for the state of universal absorption, tranquillity. The body acquires a tinge of red when it is well nourished and is robust. When it is malnourished it becomes pale.

Leave aside the redness of love or *Srungāra*. What we require is the redness of compassion. Indeed *Srungāra* itself is caused because it becomes necessary to create the world and to look upon the world so created with compassion. What first emerged in the non-dualistic Brahman is the intent or wish of evincing love. It is because there must be people to be loved that the world was created. The embodiment of *Srungāra* came to be for the creation of the world by *Śiva* and *Śakti* as Father and Mother sporting. What is separated from the whiteness of tranquillity is the love that is red. When *Śiva* and *Śakti* are husband and wife, their love is called *Srungāra*. But the love shown towards creation, towards people, all creatures, is compassion. What we need is this compassion.

When fruit or vegetables ripen, whether it is the sweet mango or bitter-gourd, *Ambāl* makes them red. The redness of her compassion must make our minds mature, ripen them and impart redness to them

You should not think that I have extended the redness of *Srungāra* to mean the redness of compassion by any intellectual exercise on my part. I have told you what the *Āchāryā* himself says in the next stanza (93)– and he says it with a string of beautiful words: '*Jayathi karuṇā kāchidharuṇa - Jagath-thrāthum Sambhōh*

jayathi karuṇā kachidharuṇā. 'Jagath' = the world; 'thrathum' = to protect; 'Sāmbhoh' = of Śiva who is still; 'karuṇā' = compassion; 'kachith.' = beyond description; 'aruna' = become *Ambāl* who is red; 'jayathi' = triumphs, shines victoriously. It is to bless the world [for its well-being] that *Sivam* who is white and tranquil becomes the power of compassion that is *Ambāl* who is aruna (red) and keeps going round the world in triumphant glory.

Here we see Śiva and Śakthi as one, as one non-dual entity.

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THE MOON - A VESSEL FOR PERFUMES

Now it is all Srungara that the *Āchāryā* deals with. It is customary to offer the wife a cool cup of rosewater with musk, camphor and other scents added to it. In the next stanza (94), the *Āchāryā* gives expression to a novel idea that the moon glittering in the sky is the rosewater cup meant for *Ambāl*. The moon is indeed *Ambāl*'s vessel of rosewater. The blemish on it is the musk in the rosewater. When we say that the moon waxes day by day it means parings of camphor are added to it. As *Ambāl* keeps using the camphor day after day *Brahmā* keeps replenishing the same. The *Āchāryā* has given us such an unusual imagery.

What is the reason behind this unique metaphor? *Brahmā* it was who was chiefly pleased with the marriage of Śiva and *Pāravatī*. That is why temple festivals which include the marriage of divine couples are called '*Brahmōthsavas*'. Since *Paramēśvarā* and *Pārvathī* are referred to as a dhampathi here, as a husband-and-wife pair, it occurs to the *āchāryā*, as he is about to conclude the hymn, that he must bring in *Brahmā* somehow. Apart from that, did he not in the opening stanzas refer to *Ambāl* as '*Chandrasēkhari*'? After all she herself resides in the *Chandramandalā* (the circle or realm of the moon). Her association

with the moon is more than with anything else. That being so, the *Āchāryā* must have thought that it would not be proper to stop with calling her 'arunā' as he does in the previous stanza, 'Arunā' being the name of the sun's charioteer. So he composes an entire stanza in which he deals with the moon. That is why he creates the image of the moon being the cup of her perfumes. A sumangali is called 'suvāsinī.' The *Āchāryā* here elevates the moon by calling him *Ambāl*'s 'vaśanā-bhānda' (vessel of perfumes). For her the moon is nothing more than a little scent box. So the *Āchāryā* makes us wonder how big she herself must be.

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THE ĀCHĀRYĀ CAUTIONS US...

The *Āchāryā* is anxious, more anxious than a mother is about her children's conduct, that people should not turn their minds to the wrong path. He is worried, so it seems, that since he has dealt with *Srungāra* they should not understand the passages concerned in any perverse manner and be tempted to commit wrongs.

Another worry of his is this: Those who are conversant with the *Sāsthras* note that great caution is needed in the worship of the *Śrīchakra*; indeed they seem to instil fear in the minds of devotees about this. The *Āchāryā* has himself depicted *Ambāl* as being at the centre of the *Śrīchakra*, seated on the *Panchabrahmasana*, and sporting with her husband in *Srungara* and at the same time being compassionate to all of us. Because of this, it seems, the *Āchāryā* is worried that people might start worshipping the *Śrīchakra* without any fear about the adverse consequences of not observing the rules pertaining to it. He is also concerned about the possibility that they might think that they can worship Father and Mother in any manner they like, by taking the easy path. Of course Mother and Father [*Ambāl* and *Śiva* so regarded] can be worshipped without

any strict rules if we are truly moved by love for them. But it must be worship without any yantras [like the *Śrīchakra*] and without chanting any mantras to invoke the deities worshipped. You may keep a portrait of *Ambāl*, offer a few flowers, chant her names, sing her praises and so on. However, in such worship there may not be true love for the goddess springing in our hearts. Also since we do not wish to perform *pūjā* to her according to the rules laid down in the *Śāsthras*, we may merely pretend that we love her or we may be devoted to her only superficially. In this there may not be any inner realisation of the true meaning of love for *Ambāl*. There can be no *Śrīyanthra pūjā* when we are not bound to a system or discipline, when we do not adhere to the rules pertaining to it. '*Na śrēyō niyamam viñā.*' [There is no well-being, no prosperity, without adherence to a certain discipline.] Not only that, if we go wrong in following the rules, the consequences can be unfortunate.

The *Āchāryā* is anxious that people should not practise yantra worship foolhardily in this manner and suffer for that reason. He has now come to the concluding stage of his hymn. But, before stating the rewards to be gained by worshipping *Ambāl* in the proper manner, he wishes to issue a warning about the ill consequences of improper worship of the goddess. There are two ways in which we are likely to go wrong. In the first section of the hymn importance is given to the worship of yantras. The first way in which people are likely to go wrong is to take up yantra worship without giving due importance to the discipline necessary for it. In the second section the relationship of the divine couple (*Ambāl* and *Īśvarā*) is dealt with. To regard this as part of a work of fiction or movie entertainment is like going for a bath and returning smeared with slush. This is the second way in which people can go wrong. During the time of the *Āchāryā* people must have had the right approach to the worship of *Ambāl*. Even so the

Āchāryā has, with a great sense of responsibility, felt it necessary to warn devotees against the wrong approach.

These are evil times. Things have become loosened; that is there is no disciplined approach to anything and there is a tendency to interpret anything and everything according to one's whims. But even today, at least in this matter, the majority of people who religiously read the hymn do so with a pure heart. However, I can say only 'the majority of people' and am hesitant to say 'all people.' Apart from those who read the hymn out of devotion, there are others who read it either out of curiosity or for purposes of research. And some treat it as a literary work, and yet some others go through it for finding mistakes in it. This hymn is meant to be read by devotees with a highly disciplined mind. It is necessary to make people aware of this: whether it is to take delight in the relationship between the divine couple [as portrayed in the hymn] or to commence worship of the yantra, the devotees must have their senses controlled, indeed eradicated. This the *Āchāryā* has done at the very time he composed the hymn [that is he has included his warning in the hymn itself].

Today it seems the number of authors, who are not concerned about whether their writing incites the baser instincts of readers or who actually intend to arouse such instincts with their writing, is on the increase. The sad fact is that they even justify such type of work of theirs.

I am told that they insist that authors must write like them. Perhaps they do so because they do not realise that the sin they commit by goading people into wrong-doing is greater than the sin people commit under the influence of their writing. As for the *Āchāryā*, he is aware of his responsibility as an author and he concludes his work by speaking about the need for the right outlook and approach on the part of the reader.

Mental discipline and control of the senses are difficult to achieve fully. But only such people as those who have accomplished the same must read the hymn. Those qualified for yantra worship may be small in number - one in a hundred thousand. Only such as those who endeavour to have control of their senses or who intensely pray for the same may attempt to be initiated into the hymn. At least during the time they read the hymn or during the time they perform *pūjā*, devotees must observe the necessary discipline and rules.

The *Āchāryā* is filled with bliss as he depicts *Ambālī* in passages of great beauty. As he is about to finish his portrayal, how can he suddenly change the course taken by his poetic imagination for the sake of issuing a warning [to people against reading the hymn or performing *pūjā* to *Ambālī* without the right approach]? When a vehicle is being driven on the royal path and when it is time for the passengers to alight on reaching their destination, how can a sudden brake be applied to it, thereby causing hurt to them? So the *Āchāryā* stops the vehicle that is his poetic work comfortably, without any jerk, and makes known his warning unobtrusively. He does not even say facing us: 'Perform your worship with mental discipline.' Instead he directs his words towards *Ambālī* and refers to the attitude of the people who approach her without a disciplined mind. It is as a mere suggestion that he conveys his warning against any wrong approach to the hymn and to the worship of *Ambālī* (Stanza 95).

Śiva burnt down the three cities. *Ambālī* it is who gives him happiness in the inner apartments (*antah-pura*). Addressing *Ambālī*, the Thripurasundari, the *Āchāryā* says: '*Purārathēranthah-puramasi*'. 'You are the *nāyakī*, the heroine, of the inner apartments. But it is wrong to think of you in the flesh and blood form and as one inspiring the erotic sentiment. One must think of you only after having controlled one's senses.'

*‘Thvaccharaṇayōh Saparyā-maryādhā tharalakaraṇāṇām
asulabhā’.* ‘The right way of performing *pūjā* to your feet is not
easy for those whose senses are wavering.’

The *Āchāryā* says that ‘it is because they have not controlled
their senses that celestials like Indra are far removed from the
inner apartments of *Ambāl*, indeed many crores of *yōjanas* away.’
(A *yōjana* is about nine miles.) *Ambāl* resides with her husband at
the centre of the ninth *āvaraṇa* of the *Navāvaraṇa chakra*
(*Śrīchakra*). That *avarana* is called ‘*Sarvānandamāyā*.’ From that
the first *avarana* is many crores of *yōjanas* away. It is the outer
compound of *Ambāl*’s capital: it is not one compound but made up
of three square compounds. In the first compound, that is the
furthest, reside the *siddhis* like *animā*, *mahimā*, etc, in the form of
deities. In all the nine *āvaraṇas* there are many deities and each of
them is an ‘official’ subservient to *Ambāl*, the queen empress, and
they grant blessings of one kind or another to devotees.

Even those who pray for the blessing of liberation granted by
Ambāl perform *navāvaraṇa pūjā* and adore all members of the
great family of deities of the *āvaraṇas* so as to find delight in the
sport of creation of *Ambāl*, in the cosmic drama enacted by her in
the sport that embraces countless phenomena that know no
boundaries. In this there is a mingling of the *rasa* of devotion and
the *rasa* of drama. But such devotion and drama do not mean that it
is all ‘easy-going’, that the worship of the goddess is an easy
matter. The devotees adhere to a very strict regimen in their *pūjā*,
in the chanting of *manthras*-and there is the sport of *dharma*, the
sport of law in all this.

If you give a party to the President you have to invite the
ministers, M.P.s, officers, the President’s P.A., his chauffeur, his
guard and so on. Each member of this entourage can do us some
good, some service. The President has given them the necessary
authority. But those who know him need not serve his ministers or

members of his entourage. Even so when a party is given, all of them will have to be invited as a matter of courtesy, since they represent the system presided over by him. That is how those who have totally surrendered to *Ambāl* perform *pūjā* to the deities around her in the order in which they are present in the navavaranas.

In this manner, on the outer limits of the navavarana, are the female guard, 'watchwomen', who are the siddhis like *animā*, *mahimā* and so on personified. After all, the sovereign power is represented by a lady, so her entourage is naturally full of female deities. You must have heard of the 'ashtha-mahāsiddhis' which are miraculous powers, powers that cannot be explained by the laws of Nature. The first of them is '*animā*' one who has it can reduce himself to an atom. To grow into a prodigious size one must have the siddhi of '*mahimā*.' Thus there are eight powers or siddhis. Two more have been added to these and so in all there are ten siddhis all of which in their personified form are in the outer compound of the navavarana.

Who are the ones that come begging to these deities for favours, the ones that do not have the status to go beyond them '*Śāthamakhamukhāh*', Indra and others who have performed a hundred sacrifices.

Indra received instruction from *Ambāl* herself and became a *jnāni*. Earlier the *Āchāryā* had said that he (Indra) had gone with *Subrahmaṇya* and *Mahāviṣṇu* for the remnants of the betels taken by *Ambāl*, but now he speaks of him thus. Why does Indra have to seek the favour of the female guard and why does the *Āchāryā* say that he does not have the status necessary to go beyond the outer compound of the *āvaranā*?

The *Āchāryā* does not say anything wrong. From the first creation up till now there has not been the same Indra. There have been countless Indras. During one kalpa (it is one thousand

chathuryugas of ours, Krutha *Thrētha*, *Dvāpara* and Kali forming one chathuryuga and one daytime of *Brahmā*) fourteen Manus appear on earth and each found a royal dynasty. One Manu's lifetime is called a 'manvanthara.' When a new Manu appears a new Indra comes up in the celestial world. Only one who has performed a hundred horse sacrifices is qualified to become an Indra. So from the time of creation until today, during the many manvantharas, there must have been many, many, Indras. It must have been one of these Indras among them who was imparted *jnāna* by *Ambāl* and who had also received the remnants of *Ambāl's* betels. We may regard him as an exceptional Indra. Generally Indras keep waiting before the gatekeepers of the *navāvaraṇa*. It is because of the fact mentioned by the *Āchāryā*: '*tharalakaraṇānam asulabha*.' : *Ambāl* is not accessible to those of wavering minds, to those who have not controlled their minds and senses. In the celestial world which is the world of pleasure, of sensual enjoyment, the denizens are ever youthful and their minds are constantly drawn towards sensual gratification. So they have to keep waiting outside the walls of *Ambāl's* fortress. We speak of '*Indrajāla*.' One who performs amazing feats, one who demonstrates powers that seem miraculous, is like Indra. But in actual fact Indra is an unwise person. Though he is the king of the celestial world he has to keep waiting outside the palace of *Ambāl* since he has not curbed his senses.

The President wears the same dress as the common people. It is the *durvān*, the gatekeeper or watchman, who is flamboyantly dressed, with his badges, turban and so on. Here, in the *navāvaraṇa*, the siddhis personified in female form, who are gatekeepers, are like them who outwardly perform miraculous feats. But there is nothing in such displays that contributes to one's spiritual advancement, not even something as tiny as a sesame seed for our inner well-being. One is, on the contrary, likely to become engrossed in, or misled by, such miraculous acts, so much so one

may even be prevented from turning to the inward quest. The gatekeepers will teach these feats to those who worship them. These little deities can be worshipped by anybody. All the manthras, thanthras, bali and so on that pertain to matters outward can be part of the worship that anyone can take to: inward things like control of the senses, purity of consciousness are not needed for the same. So Indra and other celestials worship these siddhis personified and obtain the miraculous powers granted by them. The *Āchāryā* mentions '*siddhim athulām*', meaning 'incomparable siddhis'. The term suggests he is speaking in praise of them. But these siddhis do not help a bit in taking one to the presence of *Ambāl*. The *Āchāryā* suggests this obliquely when he says: 'Thava dhvarōpānthasthithibhih animādyābhih nithāh': 'after all they obtain these incomparable powers ('*siddhim athulam*') from siddhis like 'anima' who guard your (*Ambāl*'s) outer gates.' We must note that the *Āchāryā* uses the term '*athulam siddhim*' with irony, mockingly.

The *Āchāryā* gives a third warning here, again in a veiled manner. It is that one must not be ensnared by the siddhis. Siddhis like animā are granted by the gatekeepers of the *navāvaraṇa* who are far, far, away from *Ambāl*. In this statement there is a suggestion of how difficult it is to reach her [that is there is an immense distance between obtaining miraculous powers and going to the presence of the goddess]. The *Āchāryā*, by implication, exhorts us not to be misled by the siddhis. He seems to ask, 'Do you desire nothing more than receiving charity from the maidservants of a household?'

There have been great men called siddhas in the past. Even today there are a few, though the majority are charlatans. The true siddhas are those who have controlled their senses and they do not perform their feats for any selfish purpose. If they perform miracles it is out of compassion and to help suffering people. They

demonstrate their siddhis also to reveal the power of God. What they reveal are not all of them within human reason or comprehension. There are many things beyond human reason and beyond the ken of science. What the true siddhas do cannot be a reason for ordinary people, who have no control over their senses, to feel that they have a licence to attempt the same.

Those who have no control over their minds cannot comprehend the philosophical truth behind the idea of *Śīva* and *Śakti* as husband and wife. Even when reading the hymn, treating it as a poetic work with its descriptions of the *Śīva-Śakti* couple, one must not be forgetful of the fact that we must have control over our minds. Celestials like Indra wait outside the capital of *Ambāl* which is in the form of a chakra: it shows that only those who truly desire mental discipline can perform *Śrīchakra pūjā*. If there is the will for mental discipline one will be inclined to adhere strictly to the rules and restrictions pertaining to the *pūjā*. So *Śrīyanthra pūjā* truly involves two kinds of discipline—mental discipline and the discipline to be observed in the performance of the *pūjā* itself.

In this stanza (95), the *Āchāryā* gives his warning in respect of *Śrīchakra pūjā*, but he does so gently and with circumspection, without expressly stating anything that would create fear in us about the untoward consequences of yanthra worship performed without inward discipline and without adhering to the rules pertaining to the same.

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AMBIKĀ'S AMAZING PĀTHIVRATHYA

Having dealt with the need for mental purity in regarding descriptions of the divine couple and confident that readers would have it at least for brief moments, the *Āchāryā* proceeds to

compose three stanzas in which he deals with the *Thrimūrthi*, each member of the Triad with his consort forming a dhampathi. And he does so with all his gifts as a *mahākavi*.

In one of these stanzas (96) he says that great poets are customarily called '*Sarasvathī-vallabhas*'. Strictly speaking, according to the *Śāsthras*, *Brahmā* alone is the vallabhas of *Sarasvathī*. Similarly, *Mahāviṣṇu* alone is the lord of Sri or *Lakshmī*. But big personages, wealthy people, are often called '*Srīman*'. In this manner is there anywhere the custom of *Ambāl* being associated with mortals? Or any saying expressing such a sentiment? No. As *Paramēśvarā*'s wife and a great *pathivrathā* she is Mother to all men and she is not referred to under any pretext, in the same way as *Sarasvathī* and *Lakshmī* are.

The *Āchāryā* mentions something that adds an extra dimension to *Ambāl*'s *pāthivrathya*. During pregnancy women suffer from what is called '*dhōhadha*' or morning sickness. Plants too experience *dhōhadha* and they flower and fruit only after their desire is satisfied. There is a list of such plants, trees, creepers in the poetic tradition: it contains the kind of *dhōhadha* a particular plant has and how it is satisfied. All these kinds of *dhōhadha* in the vegetable kingdom, or the ways in which they are satisfied, are associated with women. There is a plant which flowers as the *katāksha* of a woman falls on it. There is another which bursts into flower when a woman in love laughs. A third plant flowers as a woman dances and a fourth brings forth flowers if she is seated on a swing. Another tree flowers if a woman blows on it with her mouth. Mention is made of a tree which flowers as a woman fills her mouth with wine and discharges it on it in a jet. Then there is a tree which flowers if a woman kicks it. The plant called '*kuravaka*' [*marudāni* or *marudōnri* in Tamil, *mēhndi* in Hindi] flowers when it is embraced by a woman. The *Āchāryā* says that *Ambāl* who has offered herself totally to *Paramēśvarā*, dedicated to him her mind,

speech and body, does not satisfy the *dhōhadha* even of this kuravaka shrub.

Here, as he invokes *Ambāl*, the *Āchāryā* calls her, 'Sathi, *sathīnām acharamē*'. The 'Sathi' first mentioned is the name of *Ambāl* alone. It was the name by which she was known as the daughter of Daksha Prajāpathi. 'sath'yields two meanings, 'truth' and 'good'. 'Sathi' thus is the name of the incarnation of *Brahma-Śākthi*, the incarnation or embodiment of the Supreme Truth and the Great Good. *Ambāl* brought to an end that *avatāra* of hers because of her unparalleled *pāthivrathya*. Her husband was ignored, slighted, by her father, so feeling wounded she took an aversion for her body which had been given her by her father and sacrificed herself. Since then the word 'sathi' has become a synonym for a *pathivrathā*. 'Sathi', the proper noun, is now also a common noun for all noble wives. '*Sathīnām acharamē*': here it is as a common noun that the *Āchāryā* uses the word *sathi*: the term means 'occupying the first place among sathis'. You must have come across the phrase '*charama śloka*'. It is the verse recited in praise of a departed person. 'Charama' means end. 'Acharama' means the first.

Śiva is of no use for anything. It is *Ambāl* who makes him useful - it is thus that the *Āchāryā* begins his hymn. It is the *Śāktha* system that makes him speak thus. The poetic tradition also supports such a view. However, is it not the 'final word' that is the verdict? When the *Āchāryā* gives his verdict thus, he speaks in his capacity of a *dharmāchāryā*, in accordance with the *Vēdhās* and *Śāsthras* and from the point of view of what is beneficial to people in worldly life. It is thus that he gives the first place to *Īsvara* and shows *Ambāl* as a gem among *pathivrathās*, as one who surrenders to him, regarding him as her all. The next stanza (97) takes us to the pinnacle of this idea.

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CHIEF QUEEN OF THE PARABRAHMAM

*Girāmāhurdhēvīm Druhināgruhitīm agamavidhō
Harēh pathnīm Padhmam Harasahacharīm Adhrithanayām
Thurīyā kāpi thvam dhuradhigamanissīma-mahimā
Mahāmāyā viśvam bhramayasi Parabrahmamahishī*

The *Āchāryā* gives here (Stanza 97) an extraordinary name for *Ambāl*, 'Parabrahmamahishī'. According to the *Śāktha* system *Parāśakthi* is supreme; she is above all. In fact in our hymn this idea has been expressed all along. *Parāśakthi* is the one with authority to rule; she is the sovereign power. I have told you so often that she has *Kāmēśvarā* for her husband. The world needs a Mother and Father pair: hence *Kāmēśvarī* and *Kāmēśvarā*. But what is the meaning of 'Parabrahmamahishī'? To explain the meaning in some detail: The ruling monarch is *Īśvara* as the Parabrahmam. *Ambāl*, as queen and wife, occupies the second place. 'Mahishī' means the chief queen of the king. A queen who reigns and rules in her own right is not called 'mahishī' but 'maharājñi' or 'chakravarthini'. Like the pairs, 'rājā-rājini', and 'chakravarthin-chakravarthini', we do not have 'mahisha-mahishī', which means the king is not called 'mahishā'. 'Mahisha' is the name of a demon; one who is like a buffalo is a mahisha. The queen, submissive to the *rājā*, has the special name of mahishī. The word has no masculine gender in the sense of a ruler.

Ambāl has all along been referred to as the one who activates *Śiva*, as the one who keeps him under her sway and as the one who protects him from perishing. After having said all this in *Ambāl*'s glory, as he is about to conclude his hymn, the *Āchāryā*, who is concerned about *sthṛīdharma* crowns *Śiva* as king-emperor and makes *Ambāl* his mahishī. She herself likes such a position. It is she who inspires the *Āchāryā* to give expression to such an idea.

The stanza concludes with the word 'Parabrahmamahishī.' What does the *Āchāryā* state before this? He speaks of *Sarasvathī*,

Lakshmī and *Pārvathī* as the wives of (*Brahmā*, *Vishṇu* and *Śiva* respectively) the *Thrimūrthi*. Then only does he come to the fourth, *Kāmēsvarī*, that is *Parāśakthī*, the root of all and the wife of the *Thurīya* Brahman.

In the previous stanza the *Āchāryā* says, addressing *Ambāl*: There are many who are ‘*Sarasvathī-vallabhas*’ and ‘*Śrīmāns*’. But your name cannot be linked in similar manner to others. You remain the wife of *Śiva* and a great *pathivrathā*.’ The reference to the other two goddesses (*Sarasvathī* and *Lakshmī*) seems to be derogatory to them. That it is not so, he clarifies in this stanza. Do you think the Master of Adhvaita would ever speak differentiating between the various deities? To elevate the deity that is being extolled and involve the minds of people deeply in him or in her, other deities may be said to be inferior to the one extolled. It is thus that the *Āchāryā* speaks of other deities (deities other than *Ambāl*). The same *Āchāryā*, we must remember, was specially devoted to *Sarasvathī*. He established the *Śāradhā Mutt*, the *Śāradhā Pīta* and, in Srungēri, he gave particular importance to *Śāradhāmbā*. *Sannyāsins* are divided into ten groups, ‘*Daśanāmi*’. For two groups the *Āchāryā* has given the names of *Sarasvathī* and *Bhārathi* -- the second name also mean: *Sarasvathī*. The names of no other deity is given to any of the other *Daśanāmi* groups. It must also be noted that the most remarkable of the hymns to *Lakshmī* is the ‘*Kanakadhārāsthavam*’ composed by the *Āchāryā*. In fact this was the very first hymn that came from his lips.

The *Āchāryā* makes it clear at the outset itself that there are no differences, or that no distinctions are to be made, among the gods (and goddesses). Addressing *Ambāl*, he says: ‘You are indeed spoken of as *Vagīsvarī*, *Brahmā*’s wife, and Mother *Padmāvathī*, *Vishṇu*’s wife’ *Girāmāhuh dhevīm Dhruhināgruhinīm... Hareh pathnīm Padhmām*.’ This is not something that he says on his own: he says in all humility that he is echoing what the *Vēdhās*

themselves say, that there are no differences or distinctions among the deities. 'The learned men who know the *Vēdhā* speak so,' '*Āgamavidah.*'

He then adds: '*Harasahacharīm Adhrithanayām*' 'You are indeed the wife of Rudra, *Pārvathī*.' '*Adhrithanayā*' means *Pārvathī*, daughter of the mountain.

I have mentioned that, in addition to the *Thrimūrthi*, there are a number of other deities too for the Panchakruthya, that Rudra and *Pārvathī* are part of the *Thrimūrthi* family, that *Kāmēśvarā* and *Kāmēśvarī* are seated on the top of those who perform the Panchakruthya functions. So the wife of one of the *Thrimūrthi*, *Pārvathī*, that is the power behind Rudra the destroyer, is, like *Sarasvathī* and *Lakshmī*, separate from *Kāmēśvarī*, the *Parāśakthi*, and also inferior in status to the latter. However, speaking from the non-dualistic point of view, the *Āchāryā* observes that, like *Sarasvathī* and *Lakshmī*, *Pārvathī* too is *Parāśakthi*. There is none, nothing, other than *Parāśakthi*; the idea is that it is she that has taken the form of everybody and everything.

This takes the *Āchāryā* to the non-dualistic concept of *thurīya*. Panchakruthya includes five functions. Apart from these or above them, according to the *Śaiva* and *Śāktha* systems, are the fundamental Reality and its *Śākthi*. But this is not the view of Adhvaitha which speaks only of four states. In the *Māndūkyōpanishad*, which means *Vēdhic* authority, this is stated clearly. An individual has the states of *svapnāvasthā* (dream state) which corresponds to *srushti* or creation, *jāgrathāvasthā* (wakeful state) which corresponds to *sthithi* or sustenance and *sushupthi* (sleep) which corresponds to *samhāra* or dissolution. In *sushupthi*, the root or source of life, the *Brahmam*, is ever wakeful: it is the *chaturtha* or the fourth state that completes the number of states, according to the *Māndūkyōpanishad*. It is *chaturtha* that is called

thurīya. On the basis of what is said above, the *Āchāryā*, after mentioning the *Śakthis* of creation, sustenance and dissolution, does not deal with *thirōdhāna* (veiling) and *anugraha* (bestowing grace), the remaining two of the Panchakruthya concept but goes to the Brahman that is *thurīya*. He does not say anything specially in his exposition of Adhvaitha of the *Śakthi* of the Parabrahman. I have used the word 'specially' because, as some people believe, he has not completely overlooked it. I have spoken about the subject earlier. In his commentary on the first sūthra of the *Brahmasūthra*, the *Āchāryā* deals with the characteristics of the Brahman. He says that it is '*nithya-suddhabuddha-mukhtā-svabhāva*' and adds that when we say that It is '*sarvajña*', that it knows all, it means that this '*Ēkam*', this One, has others, '*sarvam*' that are different, and that It knows all of them. Then, more explicitly, the *Āchāryā* gives a *lakṣaṇa* or trait, '*Sarva-Śakthisamanvitam*'. In his commentary on the Sūthra, '*Sarvabhēda cha tatdarsanāth*' (11.1.30), he accepts the dualistic state and observes that the Brahman is '*vichithraśakthiyōgam*', that It has many kinds of power. In the language of the *Śāktha* system it is mentioned here, in the hymn, that the Brahman has *Parāśakthi* as its mahishī.

Among the greatest teachers of non-dualism was Sarvajnanathman who was one of the *Āchāryā*'s direct and important disciples. He observes: 'In the philosophy of pure Adhvaitha there is neither *Śakthi*, nor *līlā*, nor *srushti*. However, when those who have faith and have Adhvaitha as their ultimate goal see things from the angle of the empirical world with their karma, worship and so on, it is explained that the consciousness that is the *jñāna* of the Brahman takes the nature of *Śakthi* and creates the world with the insentient *Śakthi* that is called *Avidhya* or *Māyā*.' But the mind must not be turned to the doings of *Śakthi* but to the quiescent Brahman and sought to be united with It, this being the goal of the *Āchāryā* as expounded in his Adhvaithic texts. So *Brahmā-Śakthi* is not given importance in this view and creation is dismissed as

nothing more than *Māyā*. One is asked to involve one's consciousness in the *thurīya* Brahman. The *Āchāryā* does not speak much about *Śakti*, not even as energy without any gender; so there is no room to regard it as a woman, as *Brahmā Śakti*.

It is the same *Āchāryā* that taught Brahmanavidhya who is seen here as a preceptor of *Śrīvidhya*. While showing the path to those who are attached to the doctrine of *Śrīvidhya* or are involved in it, he says that *Parāśakti*, that is *Kāmēśvarī* herself is the wife of the Parabrahman, the mahishī of the Parabrahman. *Śrīvidhya* thanthra also has the goal of non-dualistic union with the Brahman. The *Āchāryā* in this hymn integrates two views or two principles: the *thurīya* of the non-dualistic path and the concept of the *Śiva-Śakti* couple that is part of *Śāktha* devotion.'

When the *Āchāryā* refers to *Ambāl* as '*Thurīya*', not only does it mean that she is the fourth, the one that is beyond the three, *Sarasvathī*, *Lakshmī* and *Pārvathī*, that is *Parāśakti* who is at the root of all, but also that she is *Thurīya* in the sense that she is the power and the spouse of the Brahman who is *Thurīya*.

'O! *Ambikā*, you are the pattamahishī of the Parabrahman. You make the entire cosmos whirl in the dualistic pull as *Mahāmāyā*,' says the *āchāryā*. He thus reconciles Adhvaitha *Vēdhānta* with the *Śāktha* system by identifying *Parāśakti* with the *Mahāmāyā* that finds such prominent mention in Adhvaitha. As he praises that *Māyā* as '*duradhigama-nissimamahimā*', he uses such language as in which *Śakti* is praised in the *Śāktha* system. '*Duradhigamam*' means 'unobtainable': It also means one whose command cannot be transgressed by anyone. '*Nissima mahimā*' glory that has no limits, boundless glory. In Adhvaitha, *Māyā* is dismissed as something petty, an enigma that cannot be comprehended. Here the same *Māyā* is celebrated as *Parāśakti*. Countless are the types of creatures that *Ambāl* has created and among them humans too belong to manifold types. Our

Bhagavatpadha is an incomparable teacher and he imparts instruction to people in accordance with their states of mind and in such a way as to help them in their inward advancement. The one who has shown many paths for realisation has revealed himself as an *āchāryā* of the *Śrīvidhya* system which is very close to Adhvaitha. He has taken elements from *Śrīvidhya* thanthra and from Adhvaitha, elements that can naturally mingle together, and given us a system combining the two. It is like the delicacy produced by mixing milk and sugar and reducing the same under heat into a doughlike confection.

According to the *Āchāryā*'s Adhvaithic concept, the *Nirguṇa* Brahman has no connection with *Māyā*. In order to take people practising devotion according to *Śāktha* beliefs, he makes the Parabrahman and Mahamāyā husband and wife. Not only that, he does not forget, the world teacher that he is, the *Śāsthras* and dharma that are very far from Adhvaitha – he does not forget that these *Śāsthras* and dharma are to be followed in the workaday world. He does not merely speak of the husband and wife relationship: he makes the wife subservient to the husband. So the Brahman is king-emperor and *Parāśakti* is his queen or mahishi.

How broad-minded was the *Āchāryā*? If we see how he had an open mind which was receptive to everything, every idea, and how he was able to be a guide to everyone and how he harmonized various views without fanatically clinging to one, when we think of all this, we feel proud that we had an *Āchāryā* like him.

In the opening stanza of his hymn, the *Āchāryā* says that *Parāśakti* activates the quiescent *Śiva*. As he concludes, he says that she keeps the entire cosmos in a whirl, '*visvam bhramayasi*'. As the *Śivabrahman* is activated, as it starts revolving, creation occurs, and everything is set in motion, everything starts revolving. An electron in an atom revolves 186,000 miles a second (round the proton). Not only electrons but planets like the earth,

stars, constellations, galaxies keep rotating on their axes and keep moving in the pathways in space. *Parāśakthi* keeps everything moving with a power that cannot be imagined by us, that cannot be comprehended by us. With all these movements taken together the mind of an individual keeps roaming. The *Āchāryā* has rightly said of *Parāśakthi*: '*Viśvam bhramayasi.*' The Lord too says in the *Gītā*, '*Bhrāmayan sarva bhūthāni*', but the reference here is to the living kingdom. All of us have '*chiththabhrama*', unsteadiness of mind or consciousness - the Lord refers to it. He says that *Īśvara* dwelling in the minds of people keeps them under his sway, keeps them in motion. The *Āchāryā*'s statement embraces all, the sentient and the insentient.

The one who keeps us under her sway as *Mahāmāyā* is also the embodiment of supreme grace, the one who grants us every type of blessing in this world of *Māyā* itself. But, in the end, she will make us the embodiment of the supreme bliss that is *Sivam*, make us the Brahman, make us still and quiescent. This is the message of the next stanza .

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THE RICHLY REWARDING MOTHER WORSHIP

While concluding a hymn it is customary to include in it a '*phalasruthi*', an account of the 'fruits' to be obtained by reciting it. The *Āchāryā* was an embodiment of humility. He says at the end that he did not compose the hymn by himself, that it was the grace of *Ambāl* that inspired him to do it. This is what he says in the one hundredth stanza. The *phalasruthi* seems to be contained in the previous stanza. No, even in it there is no *phalasruthi* in the real sense but something akin to it. The *Āchāryā* realises that, though it was *Ambāl* who made him compose the hymn, the world would know him as its author. So he feels that if he were to mention the benefits yielded by his hymn it would be tantamount to his being

boastful about the potency of his own work. Such is his humility. So, instead of speaking about the rewards to be obtained by reciting his hymn, he speaks about the blessings to be received by worshipping *Ambāl*. After all, his *sthōthra* is meant to take devotees to the feet of *Ambāl*. Instead of saying, 'by reading this hymn you will derive such and such benefits', he says later 'the one who worships you [*Ambāl*] ('*thvadhbjahanavān*') obtains these rewards' [Stanza 99].

If you examine the stanza closely you will realise that reading this hymn itself is to adore *Ambāl*, to worship her. It is doubtful whether *pūjā*, *japa*, meditation and so on would help you become enchanted by her as would reading the hymn. If remaining enchanted by her is not *upaśana*, worship, what else is?

Another thing. The first section of the hymn represents the manthra and thanthra pertaining to her; it embodies her through manthra and thanthra. The second section is a portrayal of her beauty. Thus the hymn itself is *Ambāl*. Reading it therefore is worshipping *Ambāl*, her bhajana. One is compelled to ask a counter-question: 'What are the blessings that you will *not* receive by worshipping her?' *Ambāl* grants us all the blessings of this world and the next. Leave aside the belief that well being in the next world is true well-being, that well-being here is no well-being at all. Let great men, *jñānis*, keep speaking so. Let it (well being in the next world) be our ultimate goal. Are we mature enough to reject the rewards of this world as unwanted? Can we obtain the wisdom needed for this purpose by reciting a magic spell? So let us proceed to the next world from this, step by step, with faith in *Ambāl* guarding ourselves against becoming more and more ensnared in this world, let us progress gradually so as to be freed from it. A tender mango is bitter to taste, then in its second stage it becomes astringent in the third stage sour and in the final stage, when it is mellow and sweet, it drops to earth. So like that, stage

by stage, going along with nature and in keeping with the laws of this world itself, let us become free from it (from this world) like a ripe mango getting detached from the tree. After all, the drama of this world is the work of *Ambāl*. Will she allow us to escape from it with ease?

It is in such a stage that we are encouraged by the promise of rewards in this world and the next. The *Āchāryā* himself enthuses us to take such a view. Were he to say that the blessings granted by *Ambāl* are meant only for the next world, that she grants liberation (that she 'mōkshapradāyini' alone) no one would be inclined to worship her.

All rewards of worship, rewards pertaining to this world, are under four heads: Learning or knowledge, *aiśvarya* (that is affluence, prosperity), good looks, and a long life. Knowledge or learning also pertains to the next world, and is related to the ultimate purpose, that is liberation. To advance in this world also one needs to have knowledge.

Knowledge is derived from education. So the *Āchāryā* speaks associating it with *Sarasvathī* who is the dispenser of vidhya. Actually, *Ambāl* alone is the one who gives us all that is good, not *Sarasvathī* and others. We are now concerned with the worship of *Ambāl*. So *Ambāl* herself, we must believe, imparts us the knowledge that *Sarasvathī* grants us. And to what extent? To the extent that will arouse the envy of *Brahmā* himself: *Ambāl* pours out knowledge in abundance to you. Why is *Brahmā* dragged in here? One who possesses the *vilāsa* [blessing] of *Sarasvathī* fully must naturally be *Brahmā*, her husband. To keep chanting the four *Vēdhās* as he does with his four mouths means that there cannot be 'Sarasvathī vilāsa' greater than it. But the fact is *Ambāl* bestows on her devotee learning even greater than this. That is why *Brahmā* envies him his learning thinking, 'This person has my wife's *vilāsa* more than I have it.'

Next is *aiśvarya*: prosperity, money, property and so on.

Although the *Āchāryā* has mentioned this next to learning, left to our own choice, we would ask for *aiśvarya* first. What we desire most is prosperity, then only would we want knowledge, if at all. If the Lord were to appear before people and tell them that he would grant any wish of theirs, the majority would opt for money. The desire for it is insatiable.

Learning, material prosperity and looks: we desire all three but we would give first preference to prosperity. There is something interesting about all this [bearing upon the human way of thinking]. We always think ourselves to be learned, though by trying to show that we are learned we make ourselves ridiculous. The fact is neither do we have a thirst for knowledge nor do we make any effort to acquire learning. All our thirst is for money, all our efforts are to make it or amass it somehow. Similarly, we imagine ourselves to be good-looking and we want the world also to think that we are handsome. While we do not make any effort to acquire learning, it is different with our desire to be good-looking. We try to beautify ourselves, adorn ourselves, in various ways, thereby we earn the scorn of others. But in the matter of prosperity it is different. We do never think that we are affluent. Even if we have a crore of rupees we do not admit that, 'We have enough money. We do not want any more.' We are averse to show ourselves as prosperous to the outside world. However wealthy we are we pretend that we own nothing. Indeed we keep speaking sadly to others about our indigence. All told, prosperity is our first preference.

As for the *Āchāryā*, he mentions knowledge as the first choice and then only prosperity. However much he is prepared to go along with us and speak of the benefits to be gained in this life from worshipping *Ambāl*, he is reluctant to relegate knowledge or learning to an inferior place. Apart from the fact that he is

concerned about what is good for us, his thinking must be on these lines: 'If people are made prosperous without first being given the boon of knowledge, will they not use it (their prosperity) in ways that do harm to the Self? Whatever be their own first preference, we for our part must mention knowledge as a reward to be gained before all else. If they are given knowledge first they will use their wealth for dhārmik purposes and make it a means for spiritual advancement.' It is thus that the *Āchāryā* first mentions *Sarasvathī vilāsa* and then *Lakshmī vilāsa*: *Lakshmī* is the presiding deity of wealth. In the *Thaithirīyōpanishad* it is 'mēdhā' (intelligence, learning) that is first prayed for and then *Śrī* (1.4.1 & 2). Commenting on this the *Āchāryā* says: '*Amedhāso hi Śrīh anarthāya ēva cha.*' (The Upanishad says so because it is dangerous to give money to one without intelligence or learning.) In his 'Bhaja Govindam' hymn, the *Āchāryā* exhorts us to keep in mind always that wealth or 'artha' is indeed 'anartha', i.e. full of danger.

If *Sarasvathī vilāsa* is full in *Brahmā*, *Lakshmī vilāsa* is full in *Vishṇu*. That is why *Vishṇu*, wearing a crown, ear-ornaments, the jewel Kaustubha, yellow-coloured silk and so on, holds court in Vaikunta as its emperor. But if a man adores *Ambāl* he becomes so prosperous as to excel the splendour of even *Vishṇu*. Envyng him, *Vishṇu* would say: 'My wife's vilāsa is present in greater degree in him than in me.'

In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs a name of *Ambāl* which means that *Lakshmī* and *Sarasvathī* flank her and fan her with fly-whisks: '*Sachāmara Ramā-Vāni-savya-dakshīṇa-sēvithā*'. When the two are *Ambāl*'s companions or attendants, is there any wonder about the fact that those who worship *Ambāl* will receive their grace [that of *Lakshmī* and *Sarasvathī*] too in plenty?

Earlier, when the *Āchāryā*, addressing *Ambāl*, said: 'You indeed are *Sarasvathī*, *Lakshmī* and *Pārvathī*. You are the mahishi of the *Thurīya Brahman*,' he regarded *Sarasvathī* and *Lakshmī* not

as the deities of learning and wealth but as the *Śakthi* of the Creator and the *Śakthi* of the Protector. While they were each the *Śakthi* of the deities performing the different functions, he thought of *Ambāl* as the universal *Śakthi* inhering in this functionless Brahman. In this stanza, *Sarasvathī* and *Lakshmī* are the deities of learning and wealth but *Ambāl* is the source of that learning the source of that wealth. The *Āchāryā* makes it known that if we worship *Ambāl* we will be rewarded with both learning and wealth.

Who are the other important deities for whom *Ambāl* is the authority? *Kāma* is one of them. *Ambāl*'s very name is *Kāmēśvarī*, or *Kāmākshi* or *Kāmakoti*. Was not *Kāma* restored to life by her and 'reinstated in authority'. He is also her devotee and she gives him the boon of beauty, the third of the four rewards of worshipping *Ambāl*. She makes *Kāma* '*Manmathākāra*', one who has the form of Manmatha. In the hymn, the theme of which is the beauty of *Ambāl*, the *Āchāryā* speaks of the worshipper being rewarded with divine beauty. *Sarasvathī* and *Lakshmī* are female deities. He states that the devotee of *Ambāl* obtains such learning and affluence as to be envied by their husbands [of *Sarasvathī* and of *Lakshmī*]. While speaking about the devotee who has received the full *vilāsa* of Manmatha, the *Āchāryā* observes that, seeing him, *Rathi* wonders whether he is her husband.

When knowledge, prosperity and beauty have been obtained in full measure, what more is there to desire? An astrologer, after examining the horoscope of a man, said to him: 'Everything is excellent in your horoscope... but for one thing. The indications are your son will soon have to perform your obsequial rites.' [In other words it means the death of the man was imminent.] What is the use of *Ambāl* giving a person learning, affluence and good looks if he does not have a long life? No, *Ambāl* does vouchsafe long life to her devotee, says the *Āchāryā*: '*Chiram jivannēva*'. When a man is long-lived, has good looks, a bright physique, does

it not mean he is blessed with good health? A life without illness is itself wealth that does not diminish. *Ambāl* grants her devotee a life free from ailments.

What else is needed? It is now that the *Āchāryā* speaks of the highest good that the worship of *Ambāl* brings. Learning, prosperity, good looks, longevity: a stage would come when we would wonder whether we have achieved anything of real value with all these. 'We have not yet found a way to eternal happiness,' so we would tell ourselves. 'Enough of all these, learning, prosperity, good looks and long life. Let us now seek the way to everlasting happiness.' But there is no need to go in quest of a new path. 'So far we have worshipped *Ambāl* for worldly benefits, let us hereafter worship her for our uplift in the next world. Let us pray to her for the same.' When we think thus (or do so) *Ambāl* will grant us her grace supreme. A man may obtain learning, affluence, good looks and long life even without worshipping *Ambāl* because of his past karma. But however advanced in age he is he will not go further to think of the *Āthmā* and inward progress. Such is the case with most people. However, when people who are not yet mellow enough to worship *Ambāl* and obtain her blessings for this world, a stage will come in their life when they will develop an aversion for them (i.e. for prosperity, good looks and so on). That is the time when they will have the maturity of mind to turn to the higher things, the Ultimate Reality, the good things of the next world. What happens then?

Chiram jivannēva kshapitha-paśupāśa-vyathikarah
Parānandhābhikhyam rasayathi rasam thvadbhajanavān

'He who is devoted to you, worships you, lives long, and is freed from earthly animal ties, delights himself in the rasa that is famed as Brahmanandha.'

'*Paśu-pāśa*': when a man lives by his natural instincts, without controlling his mind and is swayed by his senses, he lives

like an animal. He is then in the state of a 'paṣu', and tethered to the bamboo stick called birth by the rope of karma. That rope or noose is pāṣa. It is a man's desire that becomes his noose (don't we speak of 'āśā-pāṣa', the rope or noose of desire? It makes him go round the wheel of worldly existence, samsāra-chakra. The knife of jñāna cuts that noose and frees the animal that is the individual Self from the whirl of worldly existence. Then he is no longer a paṣu, an animal, but Śiva, the Lord of animals. He experiences what the stanza calls 'parānandha', the bliss that is beyond everything, the rasa of Brahmānandha: indeed he becomes that rasa himself. This experience is everlasting; it is bliss that has no end. 'Chiram jīvan': living long he shines as the embodiment of the rasa of bliss, ānandharasa. It is what is called the bliss of non-dualistic deliverance. It is not stated that the devotee imbibes, 'pibath', the parānandha rasa; nor is it stated that he tastes it, 'āsvādhayathi'. Were it so stated it would mean that bliss and the one who experiences it are different entities. The Āchāryā says 'rasam rasayathi', which means that the one who experiences the rasa becomes one with it non-dualistically.

Does the word 'become' (used in the last sentence) mean that the devotee becomes one with the parānandha rasa on his own? It is Ambāl who makes him so. If he achieves this state as a result (as a 'fruit') of his worship or upāsana it means that it is the deity he worships, the upāsya dēvathā, that has brought him to that state. She who brought him outwardly from non-dualism to dualism through the process of evolution, she alone can bring him inward again through the process of involution to his true non-dualistic state. The Āchāryā says that Ambāl does this to the man who worships her as his only refuge.

The Āchāryā of Adhvaitha has, in his catholic religious outlook, used here terms like 'paṣu' and 'paṣā', terms representing an idea that later developed into an important system,

that is *Śaiva-Śiddhanta*. In the beginning he extols *Śākthi*, raising her above *Śiva*, and in the end he makes her subservient to *Śiva* as his wife. He who speaks at great length about the *Śāktha* system mentions, while concluding his hymn, one or two aspects of the *Śaiva* system.

One point occurs to me here. Why should the *Āchāryā*, towards the end of his hymn, have spoken of *Parāśakthi* as *Śiva's* dharma-pathni, one subservient to him? I have already mentioned a reason: that he wished to make her an example to the world in *sthrīdharma*. The second reason that occurs to me is this: I have been saying again and again that the *Āchāryā* is the picture of humility. So he may have also wanted to depict in the end the deity of his choice, *Ambāl*, as the embodiment of humility. To put it differently: was it not *Ambāl* herself who became the *Āchāryā* and made him compose the hymn? She would have, in conclusion, found satisfaction only in showing herself as one who surrenders to *Paramēśvarā*, her husband, in all humility and as a sathi subservient to him. That must be the reason why *Ambāl* inspired the *Āchāryā* to compose the stanza in the way he has done it.

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THE AUSPICIOUS CONCLUSION

We have come to the end of the hymn, a hymn that is supremely auspicious. A wave or a stream has to complete its journey by mingling with the ocean. Thus the *Āchāryā* completes his wave of words by mingling it with the ocean that is the embodiment of the Brahman of sound. Perhaps you know that the ocean is called 'jalanidhi'. 'Salila' like 'jala' also means water. The *Āchāryā* uses the term 'salilanidhi' for the ocean as he completes his beautiful hymn.

*Pradhīpa jvālābhir dhivasakara-nīrājanavidhih
 Sudhāsūtheūchandrōpala-jalālavai arghyarachanā
 Svakīyairambhōbbih salilanidhi-sauhithyakarañam
 Thvadhīyābhir vāgbhisthavaajanani vāchām sthuthiriyam*

As often pointed out, the *Āchāryā*'s poetic genius is such that his treatment of a subject or of ideas is different from that of other poets. Other hymnodists have a phalasruthi placed at the end of their hymns. What novel idea does the *Āchāryā* use in its place? Other hymnodists are devotees who are like the minion of the minion of the deities they adore. As for our *Āchāryā* he is himself an incarnation, indeed a dual incarnation, that is an *avatāra* of the deity whom he sings, that is *Ambāl*, and of *Īśvarā*. Considering how other poets have a 'big' phalasruthi for their devotional poems, should not the phalasruthi of the *Āchāryā*'s hymn be more exalted in character? Let us see the last stanza of his hymn.

The *Āchāryā* proclaims himself to be humbler than all other poets, all other hymnodists. He says that he is indeed nothing. He seems to tell us: 'I have composed a hymn, some sort of a hymn. And what kind of phalasruthi can I add to it? I am in fact not fit to speak of all this. I told you, did I not, about the rewards to be earned by those who are devoted to *Ambāl*? What I said then would be enough. I would stop with it. You know what I am going to do finally? Whatever there is in this world, whether it is high or low, and whatever happens anywhere in the world and whoever is responsible for it, it is all to be ascribed to the power of *Ambāl*. It is all the product of her resolve. If everything were to belong to a uniformly high order, it would mean that there is something lacking in her sport. That is why she makes a number of entities appear low and thereby those that are high are seen further elevated in comparison. This *Saundaryalaharī* is rather a poor hymn and it was she (*Ambāl*) who inspired me to compose it. Whatever its quality she is its source; she is the source of

everything and so she is the mother of this also. She is the source of all words, all speech. Since this too is something made up of words, she is its mother. This is her child, is it not? I am concluding this hymn by placing this child at her feet, offering it at her feet.' The *Āchāryā* has composed his concluding stanza, the one-hundredth, thinking on these lines. In an earlier stanza (27) in which occur the words '*japō jalpah*' he offers himself to *Ambāl*; and now, in the end, he offers his hymn to her.

He is so much without conceit that he does not think that his work is good enough to be dedicated to *Dēvi*. He feels that it is foolish to offer it at the feet of the great *Parāśakthi* thinking it to be a great work. But if he does offer his hymn to the goddess, it is because he is encouraged by three precedents, three strange precedents. What are the three?

The first is : '*pradhipa-jvālābhih dhivasakara-nīrājana vidhih.*' : that is burning a lump of camphor to perform *nīrājana* to the sun. 'Dhivasa' means daytime. The one who causes daytime is the sun, 'dhivasakara', also known as '*dhivāhkara*'.

The *Āchāryā* must have perhaps often seen *pūjā* performed on *Sankrānti*; or he must have performed it himself. On the floor is drawn a *kolam* as well as a picture of the Sun God. While the *pūjā* is performed to this representation [of *Sūrya*], the actual *ārathi*, with the burning of camphor, is offered to the sun shining in the sky. Such is the *pūjāvidhi* [rules for the *pūjā* of the Sun God].

The *ārathi* performed with the burning of camphor throws light on all deities, on their idols, especially those installed in the dark *garbhagrahas* of temples. But what about the *ārathi* performed to the Sun God? The sun is self-luminous and is it necessary to flaunt before him the light of a tiny lump of burning camphor? Not only does this lump of burning camphor not illumine the sun, its own light is lamentably dimmed by the latter. '*Ambāl*' is the effulgence of all the power of speech that is there in

the world. Before such radiance my hymn is like the light of a tiny bit of burning camphor,' so the *Āchāryā* thinks to himself. 'My hymn will not show her in a brighter light. Even the light naturally possessed by the words of my hymn becomes dim.' Then why does the *Āchāryā* offer his hymn to the goddess? He has seen wise and virtuous people burn camphor before the sun during the Sankrānti *pūjā* and the incandescent sun accepting the honour. He believes that *Ambālī*, with her mind made cool by her compassion, will accept the hymn he has composed in her honour.

Whenever the *Āchāryā* speaks of the burning sun he mentions immediately afterwards the moon with its cool radiance. Such is his custom and it shows his own heart that is cool with comparison. Here he refers to the second precedent in which the moon figures. He remembers the *pūjā* performed to *Ambālī* by a learned man on a full moon day. When worshipping the entourage of *Ambālī* he also adored the full moon which is to be regarded as the abode of *Ambālī*. A *pūjā* consists of three rites of adoration with the sacred water. The first is 'padhyam', that is washing the feet of the deity; the second is 'arghyam', pouring water into the deity's hand; the third is 'āchamanīyam', offering water thrice, each time a spoonful, to the accompaniment of mantras. 'Arghyam' literally means 'venerable' and the rite going by that name is specially important. What did the learned man performing the *pūjā* do for the arghyam? There was a moonstone by his side ---

There are two stones '*Chandrakānta*' and '*Sūryakānta*', (moonstone and sunstone), mentioned in the ancient texts. We may take it that they existed in the past but are not to be seen these days. The sunstone draws into itself the sun's rays and ejects them in the form of fire. You know that if you focus sunlight on a piece of paper with a lens it burns. The sunstone does the same with greater intensity. The moonstone has the opposite effect. It attracts the moon's rays and ejects the same as cool water.

There was a moonstone in the hands of the learned man who was performing the Sankrān̥thi pūjā. It attracted the moon's rays and exuded cool water and with this water he performed arghyam to the moon, uttering the words, 'Arghyam samarpayāmi'. The Āchāryā mentions this in the line : 'Sudhā-sūtēschandrōpalajalaslavair arghyaracharā.' 'Chandra-upalam'- 'Chandrōpalam'. 'Upalam' is stone: the Āchāryā refers to the moonstone by the name 'Chandrōpalam'. The moon is believed to create amrutha, ambrosia; hence his name 'sudhāsūti'.

To offer libations to the moon with the water of the moonstone may be said to be more absurd than offering nīrājana to the sun by burning camphor to it. It cannot be said that if there were no sunlight there would be no camphor. Perhaps if there is no sun for three or four days the camphor cannot be lighted easily. But the case of the moonstone is different. It will not yield water without the moon. It is the rays penetrating the stone that produce the water. The sun is an immense effulgence. Ambāl's power of speech is like it, the sun's effulgence, and before it the Āchāryā's hymn (so he thinks) is like the light of a tiny paring of camphor: this is the first simile. In the second simile, he says that the radiance of the full moon that is Ambāl's compassion penetrated his heart of stone-which is like the moonstone-to produce the poetic water. The question here arises: What is the meaning of worshipping an entity with something that cannot be produced without that entity? [In other words the worshipped itself creates the object used in the worship.] Is this not absurd? But the Āchāryā was encouraged to do it after seeing the learned man offering libations to the moon with water produced by the moonstone. This is the inner meaning.

The Āchāryā now speaks of the third example (the third precedent) that gave him encouragement in composing the hymn. He had travelled through the land from Sēthu to the Himalaya. At

Sēthu-that is *Rāmēśvaram*-a dip in the ocean is particularly sacred. At other places on our coastline bathing in the sea is permitted only on sacred occasions. But at *Rāmēśvaram* one may bathe at any time in the sea because such is the sacredness of the ocean there-it is a *puṭya-thīrtha*. Actually it is not wholly correct to say that 'one may bathe' in the sea at *Rāmēśvaram* at any time - one must bathe there; it is obligatory to do so whenever one visits the place. The *Āchāryā* must have seen pilgrims from all over the land bathing in the sea there and he himself must have bathed in it. Apart from the holy dip there, he must have seen people performing *pūjā* to the King of the Ocean, *Varuṇa*. He must have performed the *pūjā* himself. Bathing the deity is one of the rites of any *pūjā*. Here the ocean itself is the deity and how did they bathe such a vast ocean? What they did was most interesting-or one might say absurd. They took water from the ocean itself and sprinkled the same on it, chanting the manthra, '*Āpō hishtā mayō bhuvah.*' It is thus that they bathed the ocean. 'Throughout the ages millions and millions of people have worshipped the ocean in this manner. Why cannot I gather a few words from the ocean of words that is *Ambāl* to extol the very same *Ambāl*?' He found an answer thus to his doubt. He expresses it in the third line of the stanza: '*Svakīyairambhobhih salilanidhisauhityakaraṇam:*' The water is owned by the ocean, the '*Salilanidhi - Svakīyairambhobhih sauhithyakaraṇam*': the rite of bathing performed with the water that is owned by itself.

'*Sauhithyam*' is generally understood as '*tharpaṇa*', not '*snāna*' or bath. The *Amarakōsam* has this: '*Sauhithyam tharpaṇam thrupthih.*' So it is customary to explain the line quoted above thus: 'Like performing *tharpaṇa* to the ocean with the water taken from it'. [The *Mahasvāmi* says that it was he who gave '*sauhithyam*' the meaning of bathing.] The *tharpaṇa*, to whomsoever it is offered, need not be more than a few spoonfuls of water. In the *Brahmayajna* rite of *Rigvēdins* one spoonful of water serves as *tharpaṇa*, not just to one ocean but to all the seas in the

world. The one who performs the *tharpaṇa* says, '*Samudhrāsthropyanthu* ('Samudrah thrupyanthu'). If it seems absurd to perform *tharpaṇa* to the ocean with its own water, I thought to myself, 'Let it seem more absurd bathing such a vast ocean with such a small quantity of water as contained in a spoon.' That is why I gave the meaning of 'snānam' bathing, to the word 'sauhithyam'.

The literal meaning of the word 'sauhithyam' is doing good, doing what is pleasing. Is it not 'sauhithyam' to bathe in a hot country like ours? '*Tharpaṇa*' also means to satisfy. So let it be that the rite of bathing is performed [to the deity - in this case the ocean or Varuṇa] for its satisfaction. The more devoted one is the more foolish one's acts may appear to be, the more absurd. Intelligent people, intellectuals, may treat such acts with contempt. The more a devotee appears to be foolish the more sincere his devotion is likely to be, and this devotion itself is such as to dismiss with contempt that very intelligence or intellect that scorns it. It is on the basis of such understanding of true devotion that I changed the meaning of 'sauhithyam' from the usual sense in which is understood.

The sun and camphor are two entirely distinct entities. The water produced by the moonstone is not wholly different from the moon. It is produced by the moon's rays going into the stone. But the stone itself is different from the moon. However, the moon needs a medium like the stone (to create the water). But the water with which the ocean is bathed is indeed the water of the ocean itself. It does not emerge from any other medium...

Here the *Āchāryā* observes that *Ambāl* herself produced the hymn from his mind of stone. He goes further to say that there is no such entity as 'he'-he negates himself as he goes to her for refuge. He believes that the hymn he has composed is nothing but a small quantity taken from the ocean of speech that is the goddess.

When we go deeper and deeper into the hymn many meanings will be revealed to us, many truths, many figures of speech, many pearls and corals.

‘Whether it is foolishness or cleverness, whatever it be, even that is nothing but you.’ [As said in an earlier stanza (35)], ‘Thvayi Parināthāyām na hi param’ ‘Is there anything other than what is evolved from you? Even if I be a fool, I am not an entity different from you nor am I a self-born fool. You yourself became me (I), is it not so? There is none who can think himself to be ‘I’ and be separate from you. So what about my words, my hymn?

‘The Sun God accepts the *nīrājana* offered with camphor without regarding it as foolish; the Moon God accepts the libation made with water ejected by the moonstone (water produced by his own rays penetrating the stone); Varuna accepts his own water (water taken from the sea) as something that pleases him. If they have the grace to do so, the magnanimity to do so, it is because of you, *Ambāl*. It is you who filled them with grace, made them large-hearted. In the same way accept this hymn as *nīrājana* performed with words, as libation offered with words, as *pūjā* performed to you with words,’ thinking in this manner the *Āchāryā* dedicates his work to *Ambāl*.

‘Thvadhiyābhih vāgbhih thava janani vāchām sthuthiriyam.’ After invoking the mother of all languages, all speech, ‘Vacham janani’, the *Āchāryā* says: ‘This hymn to you is composed with words that are your own, with words that are your property. I did not do anything. It is all yours.’ Thus the *Āchāryā* completes his hymn, going to *Ambāl* for refuge, in an attitude of total surrender. Without claiming any proprietorial right to the hymn, which is the nectarine beauty that attracts the learned and the unlearned alike, he dedicates his *Saundaryalaharī* in all humility to *Ambāl*; he offers it to her, makes an ‘arpanam’ of it to her. Not having any idea of his humility, not understanding it adequately, we use the word

'arpanam'. But he himself must have thought like this: 'Who am I to make an *arpanam*? Who am I to use a big word like 'arpanam' for my offering her what is her own?' He himself does not use in the stanza any word like 'arpanam' or '*samarpanam*'. But we recognise clearly that he offers himself at the feet of *Ambāl*, he surrenders wholly to her.

When we follow the path of *jnāna* we realise in the end that we are ourselves the *Paramāthmā*. If we take the path of bhakti or devotion, in the end it is to erase ourselves, annihilate ourselves, and go to the deity we worship for refuge. When a man reduces himself to nothing, a vacuum is created and the *Paramāthmā* fills it—it is like air filling a vacuum. So the bliss of the Brahman realised in *jnāna* is realised in devotion too. The *Saundaryalaharī* is a devotional hymn. So the *Āchāryā* teaches through it non-dualistic realisation through the surrender of the Self.

The *Āchāryā* who was great in all respects was also great in that he had the humility and spirit of sacrifice to believe that all those qualities of his that made him great did not indeed belong to him. 'Vidhyā-vinayasampanna': if there was anyone who fully embodied learning, wisdom and humility to the full it was our *Āchāryā*.

This is the lesson we must learn if we are his true disciples. It is not certain whether or not we will understand the lesson of Adhvaitha. But we must learn this lesson of humility. Even if we have a little proficiency in some subject we become swollen-headed. In fact even if we are not proficient in anything we become 'proficient' in our conceit. If we ponder a bit about how we are justified in being egoistic, in our being proud about anything, we will realise that all that we possess is her charity, that everything is given by her, and our heads will slant [in devotion and humility] and will be at her feet becoming light. We will then know that the happiness thus gained cannot be matched by anything else, any praise or title bestowed on us, any decoration. What the *Āchāryā*

says here, that there is no word or speech that is not her gift, everything else that we possess. There is no power save what she has granted us. Not only words or speech, even our very breath is her gift. If we breathe on our own then it would mean we will not die. When we realise that our very life is not ours where is the cause for worry or fear? After all, all our worries and fears are ultimately connected with preserving our life. If we leave it to her as her province, as her responsibility, how much peace there will be for us?

Thus, if we learn to be submissive to *Parāśakthi*, we will in the end become non-dualistically absorbed in her. When this last stanza of the hymn instructs us in humility it shows us the way to the Adhvaithic experience which is the essence of Brahmanvidhya - and Brahmanvidhya is the essence of all vidhyas, all branches of learning, all sciences. This is the big unspoken phalasaruthi of the hymn. It is only when there is the consciousness of 'I' as the doer, as the 'kartā', that we expect a reward for what we (what 'I') have done, our actions. When the doer becomes submissive to *Ambāl*, step by step, he finally reduces himself to nothing.

What is the way to humility? How do we submit ourselves to the Great Power? Is it to keep thinking of her, *Parāśakthi*? To think of her in her vastness, in her plenitude, may not be possible. But here our *Āchāryā* recaptures her in a form that we can understand, in the form of beauty. With his words he paints a portrait of beauty - from *Ambāl*'s crown of gold, '*kirītam thē haimam*', going on to her neck, hands, wrists, waist down to her feet. He decorates her with his words, even the soles of her feet, decorates her with the ornaments of his words and their meaning, and in the end he offers himself at those feet, encrusts those feet with himself becoming a big ornament. To see *Ambāl* decorated with our devout thoughts and words is the remedy for our *ahankāra*, our ego-sense. Our intelligence, speaking and writing skill and so on, which are the cause of our pride, are after all her gift to us and if we return the

same to her, offer them to her, our ego-sense will be destroyed. It is not of literary talent alone that she is the source, she is the matrix of all arts and of all sciences and, if we use our proficiency in any of them to decorate her in our devotion to her, it will become instrumental in our inner growth. Any occupation, any work, will be a means to reach her.'

The *Āchāryā* has hymned *Ambāl*, the Beautiful Mother, in words of beauty, in images that enchant us and arouse noble emotions. In this way he has helped us to grasp *Ambāl* joyfully, blissfully.

As we read the hymn, love and devotion for *Ambāl* will spring in our hearts and that love itself will be an adornment for us. As the *Āchāryā* bedecks her with his words, the love and devotion inspired in us for her become our own adornment. It is this love that is true beauty, true adornment. As mentioned earlier, is it not *Ambāl*'s love that has become a beautiful flow of her beautiful form, *Saundaryalaharī*? So, by reading the hymn, if we become steeped in this love, all of us, who read it, will become *Saundaryalaharī*. Here we have non-dualism : the hymn, the goddess hymned, the devotee who reads the hymn, all become *Saundaryalaharī*, all become united in the wave of beauty, in the river of beauty. I left out the author of the hymn. He (the *Āchāryā*) himself says, that he is not the author of the work. But how can we leave him out? In fact he is the great *Saundaryalaharī*. On one side he is *Saundaryalaharī* because of his love for *Ambāl* and on the other he is *Saundaryalaharī* again because of his compassion for all of us. It is to connect the two that he has composed the hymn that is the *Saundaryalaharī*. Things are joined together, connected, with bridges. But the *Āchāryā* who does everything in a novel way joins the two together by swelling the *laharī* by creating a flood of the *laharī*.

By bathing again and again in the *Saundaryalaharī* we must become one with it, *become it*. If you ask whether in that case our

body too, each part of it, will become beautiful like *Ambāl's*, the answer is it need not be so as far as our physique is concerned. But in the eyes of the world every part, every limb, will appear beautiful in that manner. It is all because of the incomparable lustre imparted by love. If there is a great devotee of *Ambāl* why are our eyes riveted on him? Why does our mind draw us to him, exhorting us, 'See him. See him'? 'Like mother like son.' Thus is it not the beauty imparted to the man by his devotion to *Ambāl* that draws us to him and bids us to gaze at him again and again? A man may look ungainly outwardly; he may be deformed and dark skinned and have sunken eyes. But if he is absorbed in *Ambāl*, absorbed in her beautiful form, and if her feet are implanted in his heart, people will throng to see him. They will stand on their toes so as to behold him better. Why are they eager to have a glimpse of him? Why do they desire to look at him again and again as an embodiment of beauty? Despite all his physical drawbacks, he looks beautiful because he is like a child whose body exudes the milk of the *jnāna* and love he has imbibed, because he is free from sins and from every type of falsehood, because love comes wave after wave from him and because love for all comes welling up in his heart. Let him be bald-headed but since his head is pressed down by *Ambāl's* feet, since *Ambāl's* feet have sunk into it, it attracts us as the goddess's own head that has a crown of gold on it- '*kirītam the haimam*'. Let his face be twisted or contorted, but since he constantly keeps thinking of *Ambāl* how happy and bright it looks. One would be inclined to sing looking at him, 'Thava Vadhana-saundaryalaharī' ('the wave of beauty of your face'). What if his eyes are sunken? Do they not rain the nectar of her compassion? Then his eyes too can be said to be '*Dharadhalthanilōthpalam*'. Let his lips be flat but how many loving words does his mouth utter, words belonging to the Mother herself. Indeed that mouth is revealed as *Ambāl's* own mouth which, according to the *Āchāryā*, is superior to '*vidrumalathā*' and '*bimba*' [lovelier than coral and the bimba fruit].

Let the man be as dark as dark can be in complexion. But soaked in devotion and love that he is, he is for that reason immersed in universal compassion-and this imparts a lustrous red hue to him reminding us of the words 'jayathi karuṇā kachidharuṇā'. Every movement of his hand conveys blessings to the world and brings prosperity and happiness of every kind. That being so, can there be anything which possesses in greater degree the auspicious redness of the newly blossomed lotus ('nava-nalina-rāgam') mingled with the essence of the lac smeared on the soles of Lakshmī's feet ('Lakshmī charaṇathala-lākshā-rasam')? Wherever he places his foot, we roll there mentally and for the time being at least our inner organs (antah-Kāraṇa) become absorbed there. This is what is meant by the bee of our life with its six feet made up of our senses ('Kāraṇa-charaṇah-shad-charaṇa') becoming one with Ambāl's lotus feet or pāda- padma.

If a person is a child of Ambāl he will not be like us. His very form, his very appearance, will change. His eyes will be different, his face will be different, his speech will be different, the way he gestures, the way he moves his hands and legs will be different. Thus the beauty within him will be manifested not only on his face but all over his body, from his feet to the hair on his head. He will be a child's child, a mother's mother. He will bring comfort to people in distress, people suffering in various ways.

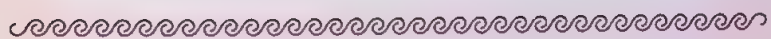
We too must become *saundaryalaharī*, the wave of beauty, the flood of beauty. For that purpose we must become immersed in this hymn, *Saundaryalaharī*, bathe in it again and again, become steeped in it, and become Ambāl's children. Addressing Ambāl as 'vācham janani', mother of words, mother of speech, the Āchāryā concludes his hymn, the child that is his *sthōthra*, joining it with its mother: 'This is a hymn to you made up of your own words' ('*Thvadhīyābhir vāgbhih sthuthiriyam*'). He brings the child that is his hymn with its mother. His *Śivānandalaharī* hymn is a maiden he marries to *Īśvarā*. If it is a male deity the self surrender is made to

him in the attitude of a *nāyikā* ('heroine' or bride) That is why the *Āchāryā* concludes the *Śivānandalaharī* by marrying his hymn to *Īśvarā*. A female deity is Mother and each one of us is an innocent child of hers. 'Whatever mother does, however it be, is right' a child who adopts such an attitude surrenders to its mother. That is why the *Āchāryā* makes the *Saundaryalaharī* a child and entrusts it to 'vāchām janani', the mother of speech. In this way he asks all of us to be children—he asks each one of us to be a child – and cling to her, the Mother. He does more than merely ask us to do so. In his great compassion he opens up a way for it, to make us cling to her, to join us with her, by blessing us with this marvellous hymn.

The purpose of the gift the *Āchāryā* makes us in his grace, the gift of the *Saundaryalaharī* is this: all of us must remain *Ambikā*'s children always adoring her, the World Mother, and always making obeisance to her. Indeed we must pay obeisance to her through this very hymn, dissolve our *Ātmā* in the beautiful form embodied by *sacchidhānandha* [existence-consciousness-bliss] and remain blissful, no, remain as bliss itself.

It is as an *āśīrvādha*, as a benedictory rite and as an indication of what is auspicious, that the *Āchāryā* who has performed *pūjā* to *Ambāl* through his very hymn includes in the concluding stanza what he calls 'nīrājana vidhih', an *ārathi*, the waving of lamps. The light cast by the lamps of the sacred Kārthika festival—wherever it falls—frees all, whether worms or insects, trees or plants, frees them from the cycle of birth and death, and confers on them ineffable bliss. Similarly, this *dīpārādhana*, the worship with lamps, performed by the World Preceptor to the World Mother—that is the radiant grace of this hymn – must cast its light on all creatures and fill the world with the beauty called love.

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MANGALARATHTHĪ





THE IMMORTAL ĀNJANĒYASWĀMY

All of us sing the glory of Hanumān, the *Chiranjīvi* (the eternal youth). At the same time it is also usual to talk of some one endowed with long life as a sinner implying that only if one had sinned in the previous birth he will live long. This is because the longer one lives the more are his sufferings due to the infirmities of old age, the dependence on others and having to witness the passing away of those younger and dear.

When such is the curse of old age why did Rama punish Ānjanēyaswāmy who is the greatest of his bhakthas? He did not take him to his permanent abode (the Parama Padam) but left him in this world. When he had taken the entire Ayodhya with him why did he treat Ānjanēya in this partial manner?

If we think of it well see what Rama gave him was not punishment but a gift. It is a great gift that Ramachandramurthi had given us more than to Ānjanēyaswāmy. We are fortunate that Hanumān is a *Chiranjīvi*. Āchāryā refers to him as “*Anjanā bhāgyam*”. (Hanumath Pancharatham), that is his mother was fortunate in having had a son like him. It is our great fortune too! What purity! A purity without a tinge of ‘kāma’. Is there any one else with such bhakthi, jñāna, valour and the ability to do and achieve? Although endowed with so much power, strength and great qualities he was humility personified and was utterly unselfish. When we think of his great qualities our mind gets into the mode of devotion.

Rama had left him here only to give us a role model and a glorious example so that even in this Kali age some good will prevail. Even if we cannot see him his presence is there all over the world. That is why the world specially prays to Ānjanēyamūrthi

although there are other great devotees of the Lord such as Garuda, *Ādhisēsha*, Nandi and *Chandikēswara*.

It may be asked, “All right, it is good for us that he is with us. But how good is it for him to be with us who are so useless?”. Herein lies his greatness. He does not look at this world as real as we do. He looks at the world as the drama enacted by Rama. In this drama, his role is to destroy adharma and nurture dharma. He has realised that it is Rama who does it through him. In a drama we see that the hero fights the enemy as if with real anger but the one who acts as the hero has no real enmity towards the other person. It is in the same manner that *Ānjanēyaswāmy* fought with those indulging in adharma.

When one thinks that “everything is Rama” and lives for the sake of his drama how will life be felt as difficult? When he realises that the Lord is present here itself it becomes for him ‘moksha’.

Even if ‘*Ānjanēya*’ had not considered being here as punishment what is there for him to think that it was a great gift? Although his attitude was one of advaita—that Rama is everything—Rama had blessed him with a bliss higher than adhvaitha—the ‘*Rama nāma*’. By doing constant japa of Rama ‘*nāma*’ he had become the essence of that ‘*nāma*’ itself. Because of this, rays of bhakthi flow out from him which cause bhajans to be conducted everywhere just as the light rays spread on all sides and show up the things which are in darkness. If he listens to such bhajans he will be overcome by joy. Even though there is bhajan in “Parama Padam” also it is like burning a lamp in bright light. Just as a light has value only in darkness it is here, in this world, bhajans of Rama ‘*nāma*’ shine. *Ānjanēya* gets great satisfaction in helping people here through “*Rama nāma*”.

There is nothing in Parama Padam for *Ānjanēyaswāmy* to do. He is Rama ‘*dāsa*’ and he is happy to play a role in the drama here to do Rama’s job; It is only in this world that he can spread

bhakti and dharma. Rain is needed where it is dry. That is why he will think that living in this world is a blessing.

Those who are great do not feel when people whom they love depart from this world. They will look on unaffected, thinking that the world is a drama. In a drama many characters appear in a scene and then they do not come again on the stage. All characters do not appear all the time. In the war in Lanka the monkey warriors died. But Hanuman did not cry. When he brought the "*Sanjīva*" hill for the sake of Rama and Lakshmana the monkey warriors also came to life. But that was incidental. Hanuman was not specially happy about it.

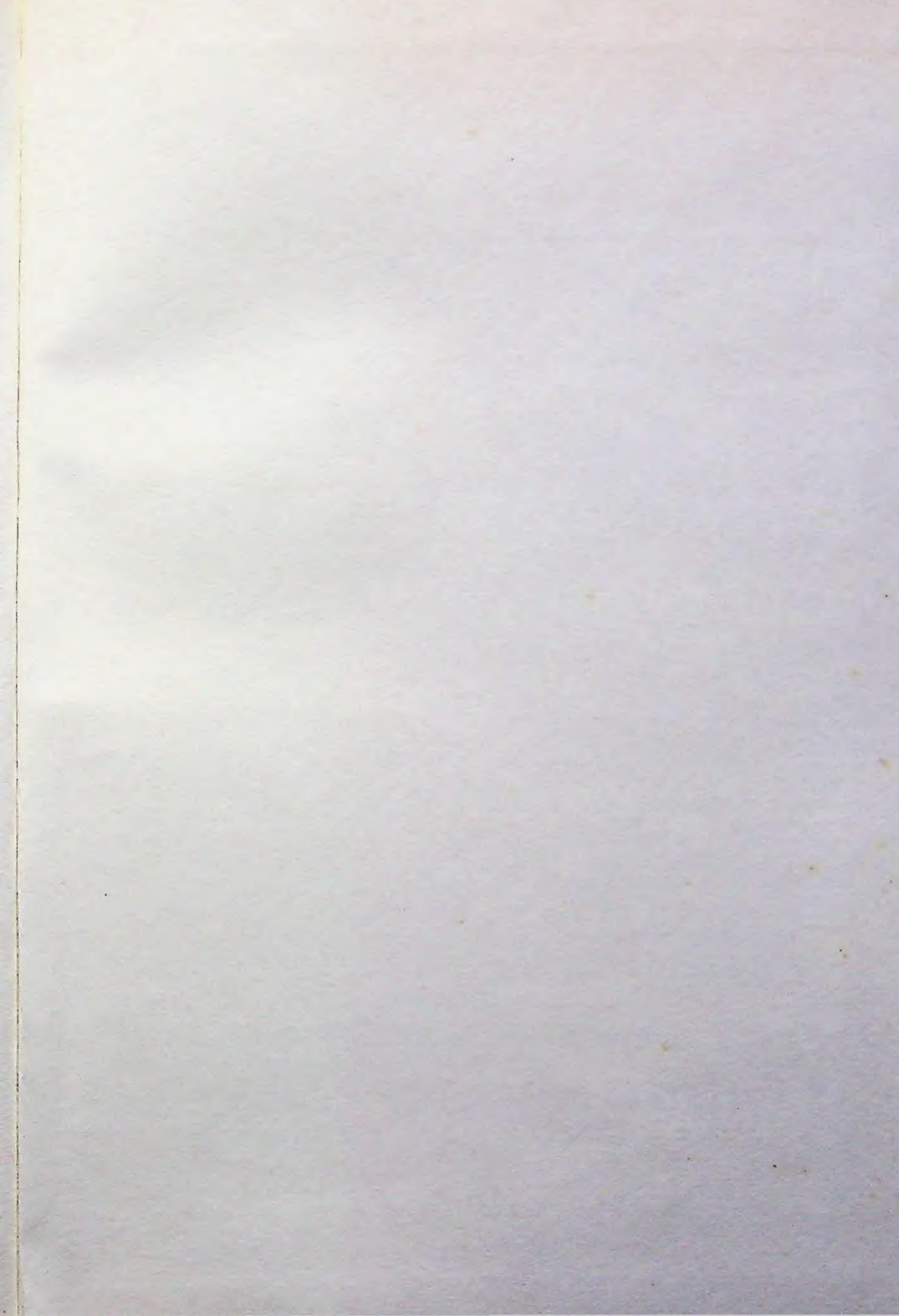
Hanuman is not affected by the infirmities of old age. His body is steel-like. In the northern parts of our country he is called "*bhajrang*". But I think that even if Hanuman had been affected by infirmities he would have taken them in their stride thinking that all that was Rama's '*prasad*'. He might think "Have not great actors taken the role of Dhritarashtra and Surdas and acted like blind people? If we have to give trouble to others due to our infirmities let us feel happy that by this we are enabling them to wipe out their '*karma*' to some extent. If they are treating us badly let us feel that by this we are also wiping out our '*karma*' to some extent" - this is how our imaginary "*weak*" *Ānjanēya* would have thought.

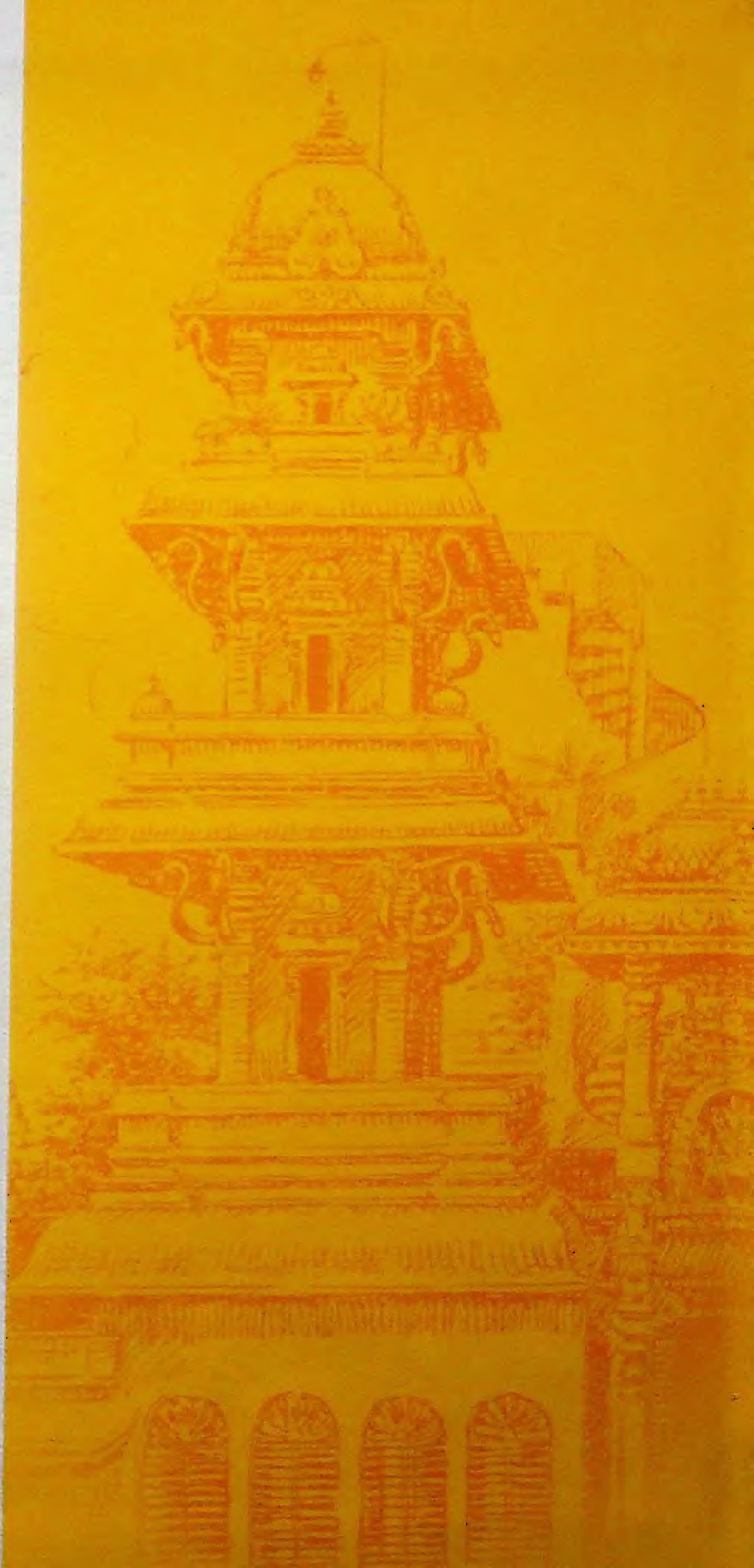
The sum and substance of all this is that if we take the whole thing as the drama of the Lord, everything will be happiness. We will not become tired of life. However old one may become, whatever distress is to be faced by us or others in the world we will not feel it and will look at the whole thing unconcerned. We talk of enjoying a drama. It is more here than in Parama Padam. There the Lord is on the high pedestal. He keeps everything there high. The "*nava rasas*" (the nine tastes) of a drama are not there, But here, what all magic he creates! What all forms he takes! Is it he that

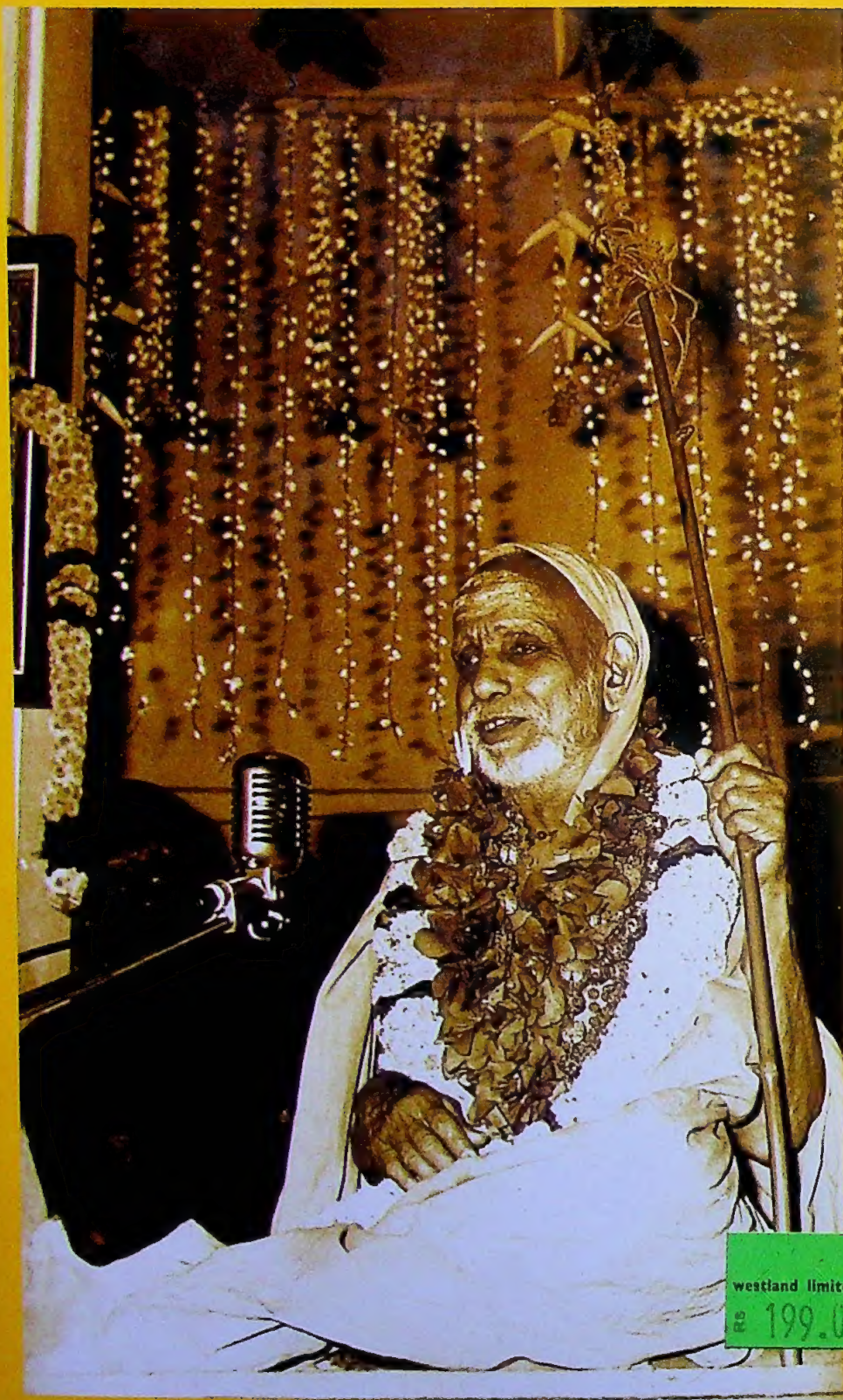
takes all these strange forms! Is it he who causes so much disaster? - thus thinking, one can enjoy the drama of "nava rasa". If we develop this attitude - if we pray to him and achieve that attitude - even a long life on earth will be welcome.

Ānjanēyaswāmy is like that, It is because all of us should become like him whenever any one does 'namaskar' (prostrates)) we bless that person with the words '*Dhīrgāyushmān bhava sowmya*'.

Mangalam







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